# ANCIENT INDIAN RITUALS

AND

## THEIR SOCIAL CONTENTS

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To

Prof R S SHARMA

# PREFACE

*The beliefs and ideals of different civilizations are often formulated* in their rituals more explicitly than in any other cultural trait, and this gives to the study of ritualism a deeper historical significance That is why the study of rituals should not only be restricted to that of classifying their contents, with a view to making out their distribution in geography and history, but the motives as well, by which they are characterised, are to be detected, and this is expected to reveal the actual social set up in which they were evolved *originally Such studies in the case of Greek rituals have yielded* tangible results, but so far as the Indian conditions are concerned, the scope is indeed very limited owing to the fragmentary and fabricated nature of the evidences, one has to handle The ritualistic contents of the ancient and medieval religious texts are so much saturated with the elements of mechanical sacerdotalism of the priestly class that in many cases it often becomes absolutely impossible to derive any significance or meaning from a given set of data It is due to the fact that the rites of the simplest level of life were transformed later into the esoteric art of the ruling or privileged class, surviving as a part of religion in their changed and distorted *forms* The '*illusory technique complementary to the deficiencies* of the real technique', by which the significance of a rite is to be understood in the background of pre-class societies, yielded quite an opposite result in class societies The primitive notion that by creating illusion you can control the reality, you actually control it, which is the basis of all rites, came to convey at a later period a different meaning illusion not to control reality, but to evade it.

The first three chapters of this book deal, strictly on the basis of the analysis of rituals, with the entire history of a stupendous socio-political transformation, showing the process leading to detribalisation and growth of state power, the transition from pre-class to class society The analysis of the three principal rituals of royal inauguration as we have them in their fabricated forms, clearly exhibits how with the social changes caused by the production of *surplus and the accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few* by raids and wars, the ancient democratic institutions were destroyed, how the tribal chiefs, the pastoral war lords, came to acquire, step

by step, more and more power which led to the institution of kingship and its aggressive imposition upon the masses who were unwilling to accept it owing to their strict adherence to the democratic values and how this rise of state power on the ruins of tribal equality, symbolised by the annihilation of Rta, ruthlessly exterminated the traditional social relations and introduced a qualitative change in the course of historical development. While dealing with this socio political transformation, which appears to have taken place in different parts of India roughly between the eighth and the sixth centuries B C , I have vigorously asserted, probably against the views of all eminent Indologists, that the institution of kingship, in the modern sense of the term, was absolutely unknown in the age of the *Rgveda* The word *rāja* which has misled even the serious and critical scholars, originally meant nothing but tribal heads who used to meet together in open assemblies and settle the affairs of the tribes and clans by mutual discussions in a perfectly democratic way The truth of this formulation was felt by eminent Vedic scholars like Keith or Macdonell, but they could not express it in the right way owing to the influence of the ideas and values of their contemporary society The vision of the historians, despite their professed objectivity, is often circumscribed by the dominant class outlook, both of their own age and the age they study

In this work I have argued that the precise nature of the social institutions of the ancient Indians is a question which the internal evidence is in itself too fragmentary to solve, and hence the internal evidence should be studied in the light of what is known of the surviving tribal institutions in general For example, the role of the tribal chiefs (*rājās*) in Rgvedic democracy, as suggested on the basis of textual evidence, (see Ch II), to which reference has been made above, can only be understood in its real historical perspective if we take into account the facts of contemporary tribal life Till recently, the most remarkable feature about the tribal life of the north eastern hill area was the fundamentally democratic basis of their social and administrative organisations "With minor exceptions the land belongs to the community and not to any individual Although in the Garo Hills the *Nokma* (the head of a clan or a village) in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills the *Siem* or the *Doloi* or the *Rāja* and in the Lushai Hills, till recently, the Chief was the nominal proprietor of all lands within his jurisdiction, every villager could cultivate his plot of land anywhere as a matter of right In society

there is no distinction between high and low Wealth and income do not confer social privileges The once powerful Lushai Chief and the Khasi Siem who were regarded by the neighbouring peoples as *Rājā* or King were as much commoners as the humblest of the humble This democratic spirit was strongly reflected in the indigenous tribal administrative organisations The Khasi Siems were constitutional monarchs They could hardly ever give any decision independently Disputes are heard in open courts where all the male members of the village take part In some areas even the women are allowed to be present at the trial of cases The judgement passed on an offender is regarded as the judgement of the whole village and not merely of the Chief and his advisers This system of administration suited the genius of the people and they were happy under it. The British, with their experience of ad ministration over half the world, were wise enough not to interfere with the indigenous administrative machineries" (S Barkataki, *Tribes of Assam*, New Delhi 1969, pp 12 13)

Where textual evidence is fragmentary and not self explanatory, such facts of the surviving tribal life are essential to make things transparent They are conspicuously present in the Grand Sacrifices, and their very presence helps us to distinguish between the original and fabricated forms of these ceremonials Accordingly, it has been shown how the simple agricultural rites, originally based upon the primitive conception of the identity of earth and woman, became step by step class oriented, how their original kernel was gradually thrown aside leading to the development of the accretions which ultimately came to take the lead and how the primitive productive techniques, by which the agricultural rites were characterised originally, having assumed sophisticated tone and colour, became decorative features of royal ceremonies The growth of these accretions has also been studied as a result of which we have been able to make a distinction between the original and sophisticated forms of the Vedic sacrifices or *Yajñas*, their genesis in primitive magical beliefs and practices, their getting ensnared by the logic of pure illusion required for justifying the existence of class society, and their final culmination into a meaningless but profitable affair of the priests, kept shrouded in deep mystery and jealously guarded.

The adoption of the ritual of a particular group of people by another group is essentially connected with the social changes caused by the 'shifting tensions' in the primitive mode of food production

The pastoral tribes must have borrowed or inherited many of their rituals from the hunting tribes, since hunting led to the domestication of cattle In the second pastoral grade, as the case was with the Vedic tribes, when stock raising was supplemented by agriculture, some agricultural features were also incorporated into the pastoral rituals In the later Saṃhitās and Brāhmanas, for example, we have references to agricultural rituals, mainly sexual in character, while they are conspicuously absent in the earlier portions of the *Ṛgveda* The same process held good in the case of agricultural tribes The uncertainties and risks involved in the work of agricultural production, however, compelled them to have greater dependence on magical beliefs and practices, and this accounts for the growth not only of numerous fertility rituals, but also of a philosophy of life, a world view, based on such beliefs

Indeed, among the primitive agricultural communities, the relation between the processes of birth and generation and those of fertility in general appeared to be so intimate that the two aspects of the same mystery found very similar modes of ritual expression The primitive notion of the supposed identical relation between the fruit bearing earth and the child bearing woman, which lay even at the substratum of the rites of royal inauguration practically worked out in the case of all major rituals The peculiar tenacity with which the elements of fertility beliefs and practices have survived in the lives of the Indian people is quite striking Probably it is due to the fact that the vast majority of them have remained the tillers of the soil even to this day Such beliefs and practices are found abundantly in the puberty rites which have been the subject matter of the fourth and fifth chapters of this work The decay and regeneration in nature have called forth the series of *rites de passage* at the junctions of individual existence to obtain a fresh outpouring of life and power The transition from one grade of life to another is effected among the tribal communities by the rites of initiation at puberty, marking separation from childhood and entrance into manhood or womanhood The qualification for admission into the adult group is not birth, but rebirth The idea of rebirth, which also characterises the death rites certainly owed its origin to the observation of plant life, its death and revival, and was definitely linked up with the aforesaid primitive beliefs connected with natural and human fertility to which the origin of the menstrual and sexual rites and other kindred features, associated with agricultural life,

should be traced The idea of death and rebirth in every turning point of an individual's life evidently contributed to the concepts of *Karma*, transmigration of soul, metempsychosis and so on How thoroughly the fertility beliefs, and the cults originating from them, worked out in the lives of the Indian masses and how immense was their contribution to the development and shaping of the aforesaid ideas, a full view of all these may be found in the sixth chapter which deals mainly with rituals connected with the Female Principle, the Mother Goddess of the simpler peoples

The connection between death rites and fertility beliefs has also been discussed in the seventh and eighth chapters, the former dealing with the popular festivals of Dewali and Holi and the latter with some proletarian rituals and festivals like Cadaka and Gajana which are not mentioned in the religious and ritualistic texts of Brahmanical Hinduism Long ago, Crooke pointed out that the Holi festival had derived its main impulses from fertility beliefs and rituals To this I add that the Holi and Dewali festivals originally belonged to the same ritual complex and that they were designed to represent the beliefs and practices clustering round the primitive conception of death Many of the surviving elements of these two festivals are marked by the colour of funeral rites So far as the proletarian rituals are concerned, the literary sources, by themselves, do not help us to understand them fully Still, on the basis of the apparent suggestivity of these rituals, I have tried my best to construct a fuller picture of the entire social complex responsible for their development and survival

In all my works, which are mainly concerned with the religious history of India, I have always tried to assert that the study of any ritual or cult in itself is of no value unless it is used as a means to understand the vast and enormously complicated problems of Indian social history How far this purpose has been served by this book, it is up to the readers to decide The views expressed in this book are mine and so are all its errors

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# I

# THE PRIEST AND THE QUEEN

## A Study in the Rituals of the Aśvamedha

### 1. Prologue. The Political Veneer

The ceremonial called the Asvamedha or horse-sacrifice has come down to us in a political veneer We are told that all the kings who were actually consecrated with the *Aindra Mahābhiṣeka* (Indra's great function consisting of five important ceremonies)[1] were entitled to perform the Asvamedha In other words a paramount king (*Sārvabhauma Rājā*) could perform it[2] A list of such kings and princes who performed this famous rite is given in the *Satapatha Brāhmana*[3] In the epico-puranic literature we have numerous references to kings performing the Asvamedha sacrifice In the historical age we find that, after the victorious wars with Vidarbha and the Yavanas, Pusyamitra, the Śuṅga king, completed the performance of two horse-sacrifices We have the coins of Samudragupta bearing the legend *asvamedhaparākrama* which were apparently issued immediately after the performance of the horse-sacrifice by that great king The Asvamedha was also celebrated by several kings during the interval which elapsed from the time of Puṣyamitra to that of Samudragupta[4] Even as late as the time of Bhavabhuti (eighth century A.D) the Aśvamedha was looked upon as the only touch stone to test the might of the kings[5]

### 2. The Original Purpose Forgotten

In all probability, the aforesaid kings who performed the horse-sacrifice took it as a *chivalrous achievement*. Its original purpose

1 *Aitareya Brāhmana* VIII 12-23
2 Cf. *Āpastamba Śrautasūtra* XX. 1
3 XIII 5 4 1 23
4 H. C. Raychaudhuri *Political History of Ancient India* Calcutta, 1953 p. 548
5. Act IV

was definitely forgotten Even in ancient times this sacrifice must have been rare The *Taittirīya Samhitā*[6] and the *Śatapatha Brāhmana*[7] state that the Aśvamedha sacrifice was then *Utsanna*, i e, gone out of vogue The *Atharvaveda*[8] also appears to regard the Rājasūya, Vājapeya, Asvamedha, the Sattras and several other sacrifices as *Utsanna* The epico-puranic descriptions of the Asvamedha certainly prove that many of its major rites were cancelled because their significance could not be understood As a result of this, it so happened that the Asvamedha sacrifice got entirely a different form, both in theory and in practice

We may refer in this connection to the description of the horse sacrifice as given in the Āsvamedhika Parvan of the *Mahā bhārata* in which much greater stress is laid on the festive and chivalrous aspect of this royal observance Though the general outline of the 'internals' of the Asvamedha, as given in the *Mahābhārata*, corresponds in some cases to the prescriptions of the Brahmana literature, many items of the ceremonial are altogether ignored, e g, the *asva upasamvesanam* of Draupadī The ritual is men tioned, but not described The practice of a Brāhmana and a Kṣatriya lute player singing stanzas composed by themselves in honour of the king and the so called 'revolving legend' related by the Hotr in a ten day's cycle all the year round are omitted So we shall not be wrong in assuming that, in its earlier stages, the performance of the horse sacrifice must have had connected with it a number of rituals of a purely different character

The *asva upasamvesanam* of Draupadī was evidently ignored considering it to be an obscene ritual inconsistent with the ethical principles reflected in the great epic In one of the Carvāka polemics against Brahmanism and Brahmanical rituals, quoted from the so called *sūtras* of Brhaspati by Mādhava in his *Sarvadarsana samgraha*, it is stated that all the obscene rites for the queen commanded in the Asvamedha were invented by buffoons[9] Here we have quoted from Cowell's free translation, but the real *sūtra* is *asvasyātra hi sisnam tu patnīgrāhyam prakīrtitam* which implies that the wife, evi dently the queen, had to take the *phallus* of the horse Certainly it is not a case of fabrication invented by the Cārvākas who were

6 V 4 12 3
7 XIII 3 3 6
8 XI 7 7-8
9 Cowell s tr, London 1914, pp 10 11

chants three laudatory *gāthās* in honour of the king composed by himself[17] The features of the rite also include panegyrics of the sacrifice along with righteous kings of yore by a Ksatriya lute player who sings to the lute three songs composed by himself, 'such war he waged, such battle he won' etc[18] The Hotṛ narrates a 'circle of tales', *Pāripalva Ākhyāna* which lasts by series of ten days for the whole year[19] Every day for a year four oblations are also to be made, called *Dhrti*[20]

On the horse's return to the sacrificial ground it is anointed with clarified butter by the queens They also tie 101 golden beads on the body of the horse and give the remnants of the previous night's offerings to eat uttering a *mantra* from the *Vājasaneyi Samhitā* (XXIII 8) If the horse does not eat, the remnants are thrown into the water Near the sacrificial altar a dialogue takes place between the Hotṛ and the Brahma The former asks by quoting the 9th and 11th verses of the 23rd Chapter of the *Vājasaneyi Samhitā* and the latter answers by quoting the 10th and 12th verses of the same chapter The horse is praised by uttering the *Rgveda* I 163 Then a piece of cloth is spread out over the grass Thereon a mantle is spread out and a gold piece placed on it The horse is taken on the mantle and killed The four wives of the king go round the dead body of the horse thrice from left to right and thrice from right to left uttering the *Vājasaneyi Samhitā* XXIII 19 They fan the dead horse with their garments and pretend a ceremonial mourning[21]

Then commence the concluding rituals The crowned queen lies down by the side of the dead horse The Adhvaryu covers them with the mantle on which the horse lies, and the queen unites with it The Hotr abuses the crowned queen in 'obscene' language and she returns the 'obscene' along with her attendant princesses The Brahmā (second priest) and the favourite queen along with her attendants enter into a similar 'obscene' abuse The same holds good in the case of two other queens and two other priests All the priests and the queens with their attendants enter into the 'obscene

17 *Āpas* XX. 6 5, *Kat*, XX. 2 7
18 *Āpas*, XX 6 14
19 *Śankhyāyana* XVI 2, *Āsv* X. 6 10 13
20 *Kat*, XX. 3 4
21 *Āsv*, X 8 1ff, *Āpas* XX. 9 6-8, XX 14 2ff, XXII 17 13, *Lat*, IX. 9 17, *Kāt*, XX. 4 16-20, XX. 5 11 14, etc Here we have omitted a few items like the erection of the *Yūpas*, slaughter of numerous animals, etc

abusive dialogue' by quoting the *Vājasaneyi Samhitā*, XXIII 22-31 Finally the queens take out the fat of the dead horse in place of the omentum taken from the goat in other sacrifices[22]

**4. The Earlier Sources**

From the accounts given in the *Srautasūtras*, at least two significant features of the Asvamedha may be derived at a glance (I) Women in general, and queens in particular, had a very important part to play in the function It was compulsory for the queens to stay in the sacrificial hall Their attendants represented women of different classes coming from different strata of society On the horse's return to the sacrificial ground, the queens had to conduct every thing When the horse was killed they had to go round it and make ceremonial mournings Finally, the chief queen had to unite with the dead horse They had to enter, along with their young female attendants, into an 'obscene abusive dialogue' with the priests (II) The *Mantras* recited in connexion with the Asvamedha are all quoted from the *Rgveda*, the *Taittirīya Samhitā* and the *Vajasaneyi Samhitā*

Verses from the *Rgveda* (I 162, I 163) were recited only in connexion with the killing of the horse The *Rgveda* knows nothing of the ritual horse sacrifice which is called *Asvamedha Yajna* in later texts The two Rgvedic hymns, referred to above, reflect an eating ritual, a relic of the previous hunting age, surviving among the higher pastorals They describe why and how a horse should be killed The horse, to be killed, is identified in usual Rgvedic style with Āditya, Trita and Yama and a belief is expressed that the horse when eaten will go straight to heaven It is anointed with *Svaru* and fire is carried round it thrice Then the horse is cut to pieces on a cloth and its 34 or 26 ribs are separated Its flesh is then cooked on a pot called *ukhā* and a lump is offered to fire Then all begin to eat uttering *āghu*, *Yājyā* and *Vaṣatkāra*

All other *Mantras* are taken from the *Taittirīya* and the *Vājasaneyi Samhitās*, especially from the 22nd and 23rd chapters of the latter In fact, verses from the *Vājasaneyi Samhitā* dominate over all the essential rituals of the Asvamedha In describing the ceremonials of the Asvamedha the *Śrautasutras* have followed the Brahmana literature

22 *Āpas*, XXII *Kat* XX 6 25ff, XX 8 8, *Āsv*, X 8 10-13, etc.

closely The *Brāhmana* s enumerate several ancient monarchs who performed the Asvamedha The sacrifice itself is identified with the kingdom[23] Special importance is laid upon the personal rites of the king,[24] the initiation of the horse before its journey by the four principal priests,[25] the practice of a Brāhmana and a Ksatriya lute player singing, morning and night, stanzas composed by themselves[26] and the *Pāriplava Ākhyāna* related by the Hotr[27] The *Mantra* s used in connexion of all these are quoted in the Brahmana literature from the *Vājasaneyi Samhitā* XXII-XXIII

## 5. The Original Form

The Mantras of the *Vājasaneyi Samhitā* may therefore enable us to reconstruct the earliest and the original form of the Asvamedha sacrifice Even in the days of the Brāhmana literature the original form of the Asvamedha was distorted and its real purpose was changed into a merely royal custom We have seen that at least two features of the Asvamedha sacrifice, *viz* the recital of the ancient legends and the queen's union with the horse, which were introduced in the age of the Brahmana literature, had their survivals in the age of the Sūtras but ultimately they declined and sank into oblivion in subsequent ages From the evidence furnished by the *Vajasaneyi Samhitā* it appears that the union of the principal queen with the dead horse, the earliest elaborate description of which is found in the Brahmana literature is a relic, or rather a transformation, of an older ritual in which A MAN, EVIDENTLY A PRIEST, HAD TO PLAY THE PART OF THE HORSE AND, AFTER HIS CEREMONIAL INTERCOURSE WITH THE QUEEN, HE WAS PUT TO DEATH

Before coming to any hasty conclusion we should examine once again the data relating to the Asvamedha furnished by the Brāhmana literature We are reproducing below the relevant portions of the *Śatapatha Brāhmana* from Eggeling s translation[28] "When the

23 *Taittirīya*, III 8 9
24 *Ibid* III 8 1
25 *Śatapatha*, XIV 1 30-34
26 *Tait*, III 9 14, *Śat*, XIII 1 5 1ff 4 2 8ff
27 *Śat*, XIII 4 3 1ff
28 *Sacred Books of the East*, Vol XLIV, pp 316ff

victims have been bound (to the stakes), the Adhvaryu takes the sprinkling water in order to sprinkle the horse Whilst the Sacrificer holds on to him behind, he (in sprinkling the horse) runs rapidly through the formula used at the Soma sacrifice and then commences the one for the Asvamedha[29] A cloth, an upper cloth, and gold, this is what they spread out for the horse He leads up the four wives, he thereby has called upon them (to come) and, indeed, also renders them sacrificially pure "I will urge the seed layer (the queen says), let us stretch our feet" (thus in order to secure union) 'In heaven( the Adhvaryu says) Ye envelop yourselves' '*May the vigorous male, the layer of seed, lay seed*' (*she says in order* to secure union[30]) The Udgātr says (concerning the king's favourite wife),

Raise her upwards
Even as one taking a burden up a mountain
And may the centre of her body prosper
As one winnowing in cool breeze ' [31]

## 6 The Priest's Union with the Queen

The above is what the Udgatr says, but what the Vāvātā ('the favourite queen') says in reply is mentioned only in the *Vājasaneyi Samhitā* which also relates the dialogues of the three other priests and queens[32] These *Vājasaneyi* verses have been described above as 'obscene abusive dialogues' However, in connexion with the aforementioned speech of the Udgatr, quoted from the *Śatapatha Brāhmana*, we like to quote the original from the *Vājasaneyi* My esteemed friend Sri Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya, to whom goes the credit of pointing out the ritual significance of these verses[33], has made the following free translation of the *Vājasaneyi*, XXIII 26 27 The Udgatr says

Raise her up
As you carry a load on the mountains,

29 XIII 2 7 1ff
30 XIII 2 8 1ff
31 XIII 2 9 1ff
32 XXIII 22 31
33 *Lokāyata* Delhi 1959 pp. 318-19

Then let her middle portion be expanded,
As (the grain) is dried in cold wind [34]

The Vāvatā says in reply

Raise him up
As you carry a load on the mount
Then let his middle region begin to function,
As (the grain) is dried in cold wind[35]

The *Śatapatha Brāhmana* offers an artificial political explanation of the speech of the Udgātr, and we are quoting it from Eggeling's translation[36] "RAISE HER UPWARDS, the Asvamedha doubtless, is that glory, royal power that glory, royal power, he thus raises for him (the sacrificer upward) EVEN AS ONE TAKING A BURDEN UP A MOUNTAIN, glory (pomp), doubtless is the burden of royal power that glory, royal power, he thus fastens on him (as a burden) but he also endows him with that glory, royal power AND MAY THE CENTRE OF HER BODY PROSPER, the centre of royal power, doubtless, is glory glory (prosperity) food, he thus lays into the very centre of royal power (or the kingdom) AS ONE WINNOWING IN COOL BREEZE, the cool or royal power, doubtless, is security of possession security of possession he procures for him "

But its real interpretation is found in Uvata's and Mahidhara's commentary on the *Vājasaneyi Samhitā* Here we are quoting Chattopadhyaya's translation of the relevant portions of Uvata's commentary

"The Udgātā unites with the Vāvātā He asks some one, 'Raise this woman Raise up this Vāvātā high' How? As a load is carried up clasping it at the middle, fix her high up As in the place, i e so raise her that the waist and the genital region of this

34 Ūrdhvamenamucchrāpaya
girau bhāramharanniva/
Athāsyai madhyamedhatām
śīte vāte punanniva//
35 Ūrdhvamenam ucchrāyatād
girau bhāram haranniva/
Athāsya madhyamejatu śīte vāte punanniva//
36 *Sacred Books of the East*, Vol XLIV, p 324

Vāvātā may be extended So hold her as it may expand As a peasant, drying the paddy (seeds) quickens the sowing by taking these and releasing "[37]

"In reply, Vavatā told the Udgītā "Thou, too, should be made to act in a similar way" Here the female is playing the role of the male As a load is carried uphill Then let his middle region begin to function, i e be engaged in the reproductive function Then press him down As a peasant, drying the barley (seeds) in cool air quickens the sowing by taking these and releasing [38]

## 7. Sexual Union Identified with Sacrifice (Yajña)

If we try to reconstruct the ritual from the verses of the *Vājasaneyi Samhitā*, the following scene flashes before our eyes the queen is raised up high by a few men, and so is the priest And in that condition they make sexual intercourse, as the ritual demands This ritual was later transformed into the Asvamedha sacrifice But the question is Why sexual intercourse?

In the *Satapatha Brāhmana* we come across numerous passages in which sexual union is identified with sacrifice [39] In the *Chāndogya Upanisad* we have the following passage "One summons, that is a *himkāra* He makes request, that is a *prastāva* Together with the woman he lies down, that is an *udgītha* He lies upon the woman, that is a *pratihāra* He comes to an end, that is a *nidhāna* He comes to a finish, that is a *nidhāna* This is the *Vāmadevya Sāman* as woven upon copulation He who knows thus this *Vamadevya Saman* as woven upon copulation, comes to copulation, procreates himself from every copulation, reaches a full length of life, lives long, becomes great in offspring and cattle, great in fame One should never abstain from any woman That is his

37 Udgātā vāvātāmabhimethayati Ūrdhvamenām kamcitpurusamāha Ūrdhva menām vāvātām ucchritām kuru Kathamiva Girau bhāram madhye nigrhya haret evamenām madhye nigrhya ūrdhvamucchrāpaya yathā asyā vāvātāyā madhyam yonipradeśah edhatām 'Edh Vrddhau' Vrddhim yāyāt athainām grhnīyāh Śīte vāte punanniva Yathā krsivālah dhānyam vāte suddham kurvan grahanamoksau jhatiti karou

38 Vāvātā pratyāhodgātāram Bhavatopyetadevam. Ūrdhvamenam udgātāramucchrāyatām ucchrāpaya Atha strih purusāyate girau bhāram haranniva. Athaiva kriyamānasyāsya madhyam prajananam ejatu calatu Athainam nigrahisva śīte vāte punanniva yavān

39 1 9 2 7, 1 9 2 11, VI 4 3 7, VI 6 2 8, VI 6. 1 11, etc.

rule,"[40] In many scattered passages of the Upaniṣads, the woman is conceived as the sacrificial fire, her lower portion as the sacrificial wood, the genitalia as the flames the penetration as the carbon, and the copulation as the spark [41] The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*[42] says that the lower portion of a woman (*upastha*) is to be conceived as the sacrificial altar (*vedi*), the pubic hairs (*lomāni*) as the sacrificial grass, the outerskin (*bahiscarman*) as the floor for the pressing of the soma plants (*adhiṣavana*), and the two labia of the vulva (*muṣkau*) as the inmost fire He who remembers this during copulation gets the reward of the Vājapeya sacrifice The same text goes on so far as to state that, if a woman refuses sexual union, she must be forced to do so [43]

## 8. Vedic Sacrifices: Their Primitive and Sophisticated Forms

It is to be remembered in this connexion that there is a gulf of difference between the original and later forms of the sacrifices Originally the sacrifices were simple rituals, magical rather than propitiatory "The majority of the sacrificial ceremonies", says Winternitz, "as also the Yajus formula, do not aim at 'worshipping' the gods, but at influencing them, at compelling them to fulfil the wishes of the sacrificer "[44] Keith has also to admit in connexion with the sacrifices as described in the Brahmana literature that "in the vast majority of these cases the nature of the ritual can be solved at once by the application of the concept of sympathetic magic, and this is one of the most obvious and undeniable facts in the whole of the Vedic sacrifice it is from beginning to end full of magic elements "[45] Similar views are held by Bergaigne, Geldner, Weber and others Macdonell writes "It is thus impossible to suppose that the sacrificial priests of the *Rgveda*, the composers of the old hymns, should have occupied an isolated position, untouched by magical practices derived from a much earlier age and afterwards continued throughout the priestly literature of later times In

40 II 1 3 Hume s tr
41 Cf *Chandogya* V 8 1 2, *Bṛhadaranyaka*, VI 2 13
42 VI 4 3
43 VI 4 6 7
44 *History of Indian Literature*, Calcutta 1922 Vol I, p 181
45 *Religion and Philosophy of the Veda*, pp 258-9

fact, a close examination of the hymns of the *Rgveda* actually affords the evidence that even in them the belief in magical powers independently of the gods is to be found Every page of the *Brāhmanas* and the *Sūtras* shows that the whole sacrificial ceremonial was overgrown with the notion that the sacrifice exercised power over gods and, going beyond them, could directly influence things and events without their intervention An incipient form of this notion already appears in the *Rgveda*, where exaggerated sacrificial powers are attributed to ancient priests "[46]

"Primitive magic is founded on the notion that, by creating the illusion that you control reality, you can actually control it It is an illusory technique complementary to the deficiencies of the real technique Owing to the low level of production the subject is as yet imperfectly conscious of the objectivity of the external world, and consequently the performance of the preliminary rite appears as the cause of the success in the real task, but at the same time as a guide to action magic embodies the valuable truth that the external world can in fact be changed by man's subjective attitude towards it "[47] Referring to the potato dance of the Maori, George Thomson observes It is not possible that the potatoes will be influenced by the dance, but the dance may influence the dancers themselves At least they believe that their dance has something to do with the growth of the plants, and when they tend the plants with this belief, their capacity and self reliance obviously increase [48] The means of production were meagre and insufficient in the earliest stages of human history The impetus derived from collective magical performances was thus valuable It was also a means of production, probably the most valuable instrument

The original purpose of magic was thus economic It was directly connected with food gathering or food production, though so great a scholar like Sir Frazer did not care to understand this The original purpose of the Vedic sacrifices was also the same Reference has already been made to the *Sattra jaga* which may be regarded as one of the earliest forms of the Vedic sacrifices One of the significant rituals of this *Sattra* was called *Mahāvrata* [49] Since

46 *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* Vol VIII, p 312
47 G Thomson *Aeschylus and Athens* London 1941 pp 13 14
48 *Studies in Ancient Greek Society* Vol I, London 1949 p 440
49 A B Keith *The Veda of the Black Yajus School* HOS 1914 p CXXX

*Mahāvrata* means *anna* or food,[50] it may be assumed that the purpose of the *Sattrayāga* was originally connected with food Another ancient Vedics acrifice was called *Vājapeya*[51] which means 'food and drink' Though in subsequent ages its purpose was changed, it was originally an agricultural ritual, as Keith has pointed out rightly [52] So it appears that the original purpose of sacrifice does not differ fundamentally from that of magic Though with the change in the technique of production the pre class tribal societies disintegrate, magical practices do not die entirely But their purpose begins to change Thus in class societies primitive magic transforms itself into the esoteric art of the ruling or privileged class It survives as a part of religion in its changed and distorted form [53]

## 9 Why Sexual Union?

In a preceding section we have quoted a passage from the *Bṛhadaranyaka Upaniṣad* which states that by copulation, according to the rules prescribed, one gets the results of the Vajapeya sacrifice Since *Vajapeya* means food and drink there is no difficulty in thinking that by sexual union, as the said Upaniṣad suggests, one is entitled to get food and drink In other words sexual union is regarded as a means, or rather a technique of food production Reference must be made in this connexion to the passages of the *Vajasaneyi Samhita* describing the priest's ritual intercourse with the queen which we have already quoted along with the commentary of Uvata The ritual intercourse between the priest and the queen is brought there significantly in relation to the act of sowing in the field *yatha kṛṣivalah dhānyam vate śuddham kurvan grahanamoksau jhatiti karoti*

The magical or religious rites intended to secure the fertility of the fields were thought as belonging to the special competence of the women who were the first cultivators of the soil and whose power of child bearing was believed to have a sympathetic effect on the growth of the plant [54] The association of sexual union with agri

50 *Śatapatha Brahmana* IV 6 4 2 *Tandyamahabrahmana* IV 10 2 Cf Kane *History of Dharmasastra* Vol II p 1243
51 For details see *Sacred Books of the East* Vol XLI pp XXIIIff cf *infra* pp 48-69
52 *The Veda of the Black Yajus School* pp CX CXI
53 G Thomson *Religion* London 1950 p 9 See *infra* pp 60 68
54 R Briffault, *The Mothers* London 1952 Vol II pp 251 52

culture is thus universal The aborigines of Central America employ some persons for the purpose of sexual union on the eve of sowing The Musquakis select a man and a woman to make sexual intercourse in the field Similar customs are in vogue in Peru, Chile, New Mexico, Nikaragua and other Latin American countries Referring to these customs Briffault observes that ' the belief that sexual act assists the promotion of abundant harvest of the earth's fruits and is indeed indispensable to secure it, is universal in the lower phases of culture "[55] Frazer also cites similar examples from Central America, Java, New Guinea and many other countries [56] Among the Hos of Chotanagpur, during the harvest festival complete sexual liberty is given to the girls The Kotas of the Nilgiri hills have a similar festival of sexual freedom In Orissa, among the Bhuiyas sexual freedom is given to the girls during their harvest festival called *Māgh Porāi* In Assam, woman are allowed during spring festivals complete freedom 'without any stain, blemish or loss of reputation' The same holds good in the harvest festivals of many other tribes of India [57] (See Chs V-VI)

"The relation of the queen and the horse, according to Oldenberg, is clearly a fertility spell, while the 'obscene' language, he thinks, might be explained in the same sense ' [58] We have seen that the 'obscene dialogue' used in the Asvamedha sacrifice during the queen's union with the horse is found in an earlier text called the *Vājasaneyi Samhitā* and that from the said 'obscene dialogue' is found the relic of an older ritual in which the queen, instead of lying with the horse, had to make sexual intercourse with the priest We have also suggested that the ASVAMEDHA WAS THE GRADUAL TRANSFORMATION OF THIS OLDER RITUAL IN WHICH, IN ALL PROBABILITY, THE PRIEST HAD TO DIE AFTER HIS CEREMONIAL INTERCOURSE WITH THE QUEEN Eggeling held that the Purusamedha or human sacrifice developed out of the Asvamedha,[59] but the fact was reverse the horse became a substitute for the man

But still we are to answer a number of questions If it was originally a fertility magic, why was the queen specially selected

55 *Ibid*, Vol. III, pp 207ff
56 *The Golden Bough* pp 135-36
57 For these and other examples see my *Indian Puberty Rites* pp 45ff
58 Keith *Religion and Philosophy of the Veda* p 315
59 *Sacred Books of the East* Vol XLIV p XXXIII

for sexual union with the priest? What are the grounds for supposing that the priest was killed after his sexual intercourse with the queen? Why and how a collective agricultural ritual became in later times the affair of a king and began to be looked upon as the symbol of royal greatness?

## 10. From Tribe to State

The pre class tribal societies disintegrated owing to the revolutionary changes in the technique of production In the higher pastoral grade when stock-raising was supplemented by agriculture or in the higher agricultural grade when agriculture was supplemented by stock raising, there was a 'revolutionary change in the field of production, since surplus began to be produced This change in the mode of production also changed the existing social values and relations Conflict arose regarding the ownership of the surplus and thus developed class division and the growth of a privileged class In order to look after the interest of the privileged class, laws were enacted, police or military system was introduced In other words, characteristics of modern state revealed their ugly appearances over the pre class undifferentiated tribal societies

The process of the rise of kingship in pastoral societies can be traced even to the *Rgveda* In every chapter of the *Rgveda*, desire for cattle is reflected[60] and there is every ground to believe that the Rgvedic people did not depend on agriculture They despised it as the occupation of the conquered people References to agriculture are very few in the *Rgveda*[61] Out of its 10 462 verses, only 25 refer to agriculture, most of which belong to the later portions of the text Cattle lifting was a usual practice of the Rgvedic tribes The term *gaviṣṭi* used for cattle lifting was also a term for war Stories of cattle lifting are found in the *Rgveda*, the Panis were renowned cattle-lifters[62] Even in the days of the *Mahābhārata*, cattle lifting was regarded as token of heroism The great Kurus did not feel ashamed to rob the cattle of king Virāta In the *Rgveda*, intertribal warfare, a characteristic of pastoral society, is frequently mentioned

Still in the *Rgveda*, we come across passages bearing relics of

60 Winternitz *History of Indian Literature* Vol. I, p 64
61 E. W Hopkins in *Journal of the American Oriental Society* Vol XVII pp 84-85
62 See Ch. II Sec. 3 pp 27 29

their pre-class or undifferentiated state. Originally there was a type of communism among the Ṛgvedic gods,[63] said Max Müller, and he coined a term Henotheism to denote that state, but subsequently with the growth of class division among human beings its reflection was seen even in the Vedic pantheon. There are so many passages in the *Ṛgveda* which refer to wealth and cattle as common property and to their equal distribution.[64] In the concluding verses of the *Ṛgveda* unity of mind and determination is desired and in that connexion the following statement is significant: *devā bhāgah yathāpūrve samjānānā upāsate*.[65] This implies that there was once a time when the gods used to sit together and take their respective shares collectively and consciously, and in all probability refers to a lost age when men used to do the same, the age when society was undifferentiated.

## 11 Growth of Non-Violent Religions

The general character of the *Ṛgveda*, therefore, reflects a society based upon class division, though here and there in the same text are found relics of an undifferentiated society through which the Vedic tribes passed their pre-pastoral hunting stage. The Ṛgvedic religion was mainly connected with sky, in which astral and nature myths predominated. The deities of the *Ṛgveda* were in most of the cases personifications of different natural phenomena under which the herders had to live. This was a new religion gradually adopted by hunting tribes coming into pastoral stage. But they could not give up the religious practices of their pre-pastoral life. Deities of the pastoral religion were propitiated with pre-pastoral rituals. Of these rituals, animal sacrifice was obviously the most important. With the growth of organised priesthood in the post Ṛgvedic age, the sacrifice of cattle became a senseless source of the destruction of cattle wealth.

In higher pastoral societies, cattle are used principally for milk and wealth, not for meat, and therefore the flesh of domestic animals—especially female—is commonly tabooed.[66] This alone explains the taboo of beef-eating which is one of the main characteristics of present day Hindu society. The higher pastoral attitude

63. Cf. RV. 1.25.6; I.111.2; IV.59.2; V.87.4; VII.73.? etc.
64. I.24.3; I.27.6; I.10?.4; I.141.1; II.14.12; III.2.1?; VI.66.1; VII.5?.21; VII.76.45 etc.
65. X.191.2. See Ch. II Sec. 9-10, pp. 41-44.
66. W. Robertson Smith, *Religion of the Semites*, London 1927, p. 405.

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63 Cf RV I 25 6 I 111 2 IV 51 2 X 87 4 VII 73 2 etc.
64 I 24 3, I 27 6 I 102 4 I 141 1 II 14 12 III 2 12 VI 65 1 VII 52 21, VII 76 45 etc
65 X 191 2  See Ch II Sec. 9 10 pp 41-44
66. W Robertson Smith *Religion of the Semites*, London 1927 p. 406

towards the pre-pastoral tribal habit of meat eating is reflected in a verse of the *Rgveda* which denounces the Kikatas, a tribe of Magadha, for their misuse of cattle[67] Higher pastorals, and also higher agriculturists, led to the production of surplus and prepared the ground for the rise of urban settlements Trade was facilitated in which cattle served as the best medium of exchange The Brahmanical religious practices did not suit this new condition The Brahmanical attitude towards trade was not helpful

The Buddhist and Jain emphasis on non injury to animals thus assumes a new significance in this context The *Suttanipāta* states that cattle should be protected because they are the givers of food, beauty and happiness[68] This was certainly a teaching based upon the growing demands of the traders In fact, this was the crying demand of the age, even the Ksatriya rulers desired to depend more upon the wealth of the traders than upon the magical powers of the Brāhmana priests The Brahmavidyā (knowledge of *Brahman*, the absolute, the universal soul) of the Upanisads was sponsored not by the Brāhmanas but by the Ksatriyas who held that the Brahmanical sacrificial religion was useless[69] In fact, Buddhism was not a sudden rise It gave moral support to all the demands of the trading class Money lending, usury and slave keeping are not condemned in the Buddhist texts[70]

## 12. Kingship in Agricultural Societies

The Rgvedic tribes were pastoral and it was quite possible that they learnt agriculture from their neighbouring tribes Only a few verses dealing with agriculture are found in the *Rgveda* and the majority of them are found in the first and tenth *mandalas* This implies that the Vedic tribes were acquainted with agriculture when the later portions of the *Rgveda* were being composed In the later *Samhitās* as well as in the *Brāhmana* literature we come across numerous agricultural rituals These were evidently adopted from the agricultural peoples who lived side by side with the pastorals One should not fail to recall in this connexion that the economic basis of

67 III 53 14

68 VV 296-97, 309

69 See my paper On the Ksatriya Authorship of Brahmavidyā' in *The Modern Review*, Feb 1961

70 R S Sharma in *Das Kapital Centenary Volume*, New Delhi 1968, p 63

the pre Vedic Harappa culture was agriculture [71]

Kingship in agricultural societies did not develop in the same way as it did in the pastoral societies "The development of agricultural civilization without any intervening pastoral phase enhanced the matriarchal position of women not only as owners and heiresses of the arable land, but also through their traditional association with magic or religion "[72] There is every reason to believe that the earliest magicians were women and that it was their duty to take an important part in the performance of the rites so that the land might yield a good harvest Here the concept of ruling originated from the magical functions which archaic queens or priestesses were expected to discharge on behalf of the community In societies, where father right elements were not aggressively imposed, we have the superiority of the priestess over the priest, or the queen over the king, based on a corresponding superiority of the goddess or divine ancestress over the god or the divine ancestor Accordingly not only the royal office was filled by a woman, but the queen was in every stage of development of that office considerably more than merely the wife of the king

## 13. The Queen's Sexual Cycle

The combination of the priestly with kingly office in the 'divine kingships' widely reported from many parts of the world, led Frazer to suggest that the institution of divine kingship was derived from the belief that the well being of the social and natural orders depended upon the vitality of the priest king, who must therefore be slain when his powers began to fail him and be replaced by a vigourous successor The priest's or king's tenure of office was limited in early times to a prescribed period at the end of which he was put to death In a series of ritual acts he had to make intercourse with the priestess or goddess-queen, mark out the soil for distribution among the clans, turn the first sod with his sacred hoe, cut the first ear of corn with his sacred sickle and, finally, at harvest he was put to death, to be replaced at the new year by a successor of unimpaired vitality [73]

71 V Gordon Childe *What Happened in History*, London 1957, p 125, *New Light on the Most Ancient East* London 1934, p 176

72 Briffault, *The Mothers*, Vol II p. 251

73 See Frazer s *Dying God* (G B III) Cf S H. Hooke, *Myth and Ritual* Oxford 1933

The killing of the king or the priest was thus originally nothing but an incident in the women's ritual cycle Thomson writes "It was necessary for the queens to conceive in order that the earth might bear fruit Their sexual life was a cycle of mimetic magic. Accordingly, the procreation was imagined as a god in the first instance, no doubt, the god of the moon, which in primitive thought is the cause of pregnancy in woman and fertility in the soil and after serving their purpose the men in whom this god was embodied were put to death They had to die in order that the crops might live This ritual, which inspired the myths of Ishtar and Tammuj, Isis and Osiris, Venus and Adonis, is the precursor of the Greek sacred marriage, in which it was adopted to the conditions of monogamy" [74]

## 14. The Dying God

Now, we are in a position to answer why the queen was especially selected for sexual union with the priest and why the latter was killed after the performance of such a ritual

Of course, it will be foolish to expect that, in the historical period when the class division became fully established and a feudal system developed out of it, kings or priests would dedicate their physical bodies in this way Beasts were supplied as substitutes for men in such rituals, as we find even now a days articles like the pumpkin becoming substitutes for beasts in non violent religions However, in the matriarchal zones of India, as is reasonable to expect on the basis of what we have stated above, we come across the existence of certain customs reflecting the rituals of the 'dying god' Duart Barbosa who travelled in the Malabar region in the sixteenth century stated that in some places of that region the king could hold his office only for twelve years and then he was put to death [75] The kings of Calicut were also god kings who had to commit ceremonial suicide after twelve years of kingship Towards the end of the seventeenth century this system was slightly changed Twelve years over, there was a big ceremony at the end of which the king was killed He was kept surrounded by his bodyguards He who could break the barricade of the bodyguards and kill the king was assigned

74 *Studies in Ancient Greek Society*, Vol I, pp 158 59 cf *infra*, pp 122 25

75 *Description of the Coasts of East Africa and Malabar*, Tr H E. Stanley, London 1866, pp, 172ff

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74 *Studies in Ancient Greek Society* Vol I pp 159-59 cf *infra* pp 122 25
75 *Description of the Coasts of East Africa and Malabar*, Tr H E. Stanley, London 1866 pp 172ff

*Brāhmana* account[80] which is a commentary on the Ṛgvedic hymn, though not explaining the most obscure feature of the latter, states that Pururavas became a *gandharva* after making himself the upper and lower *arani* s of Asvattha wood from which fire results Else where in the same text,[81] the working of two portions of fire drill or fireplough is conceived in terms of human procreation symbolised by Urvasī and Purūravas The association of the working of fire-drill with sexual intercourse is met with in the *Bṛhadāranyaka Upanisad*[82] and in other places Moreover, the *Satapatha Brāhmana* states that Pururavas became a *gandharva* after transforming himself into the *arani*-s He could become that only after his physical death Though the *gandharvas* possess a separate heaven of their own, a human being can attain it only as a spirit This is also supported by the evidence furnished in the *Bṛhadaranyaka Upaniṣad*[83]

In the pages of the Brāhamna literature we come across passages which indicate that Prajāpati was killed at a sacrifice after a ceremonial sexual union The name Prajapati is significant because it means 'a lord of men or subjects' The legend which we find in the Brāhmana literature is already sophisticated In the *Satapatha Brāhmana*,[84] the legend is stated thus "Prajapati conceived a passion for his own daughter—either the Sky or the Dawn 'May I pair with her', thus (thinking) he united with her This assuredly was a sin in the eyes of the gods 'He who acts thus towards his own daughter, our sister, (commits a sin), they thought The gods then said to this god who rules over the beasts (Rudra) 'This one surely commits a sin who acts thus towards his own daughter, our sister Pierce Him Rudra, taking it, pierced him Half of the seed fell on the ground And thus it came to pass Accordingly it has been said by the Ṛṣi with reference to that (incident) 'When the father embraced his daughter, uniting with her, he dropped his seed on the earth' This (became) the chant (*uktha*) called *Agnimaruta*, in (connexion with) this it is set forth how the gods caused the seed to spring When the anger of the gods subsided, they cured Prajāpati and cut out that dart of this (Rudra), for Prajapati doubtless is this sacrifice"[85] According to the version of the legend given

80 XI 5 1ff
81 III 4 1 22
82 VI 4 22
83 III 4, III 7
84 I 7 4 1 8, Cf II 1 2 9 (Madh), II 7 2 1-8, I 1 2 5-6 (Kan.)
85 *Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. XII, pp 208-10

in the *Aitareya Brahmana*,[86] Prajāpati transformed himself into a roebuck (*ṛṣya*) and approached his own daughter who assumed the shape of a doe (*rohit*). Out of their most fearful forms the gods then fashioned a divine being called Bhūtavat (i e Rudra) in order to punish Prajāpati for his incestuous deed. The latter was accordingly pierced by Bhutavat's arrow and bounded up to the sky, where he became the constellation called *Mṛga*, while his daughter became the star *Rohinī*. The legend is found also in the *Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmana*.[87]

From the two versions of the same legend, we find that the woman with whom Prajāpati had sexual union was his own daughter. Then he was simply killed and just as Purūravas became a *gandharva* only after his physical death so also Prajapati became the star *mṛga*. The whole thing is regarded as an affair of incest of the father with his daughter and the killing of Prajapati was interpreted as an act of punishment. Up to this the traditional interpretation may be regarded as consistent, and there is no doubt that this interpretation gave rise to the Puranic legend of Brahmā and Śatarūpā. But the subsequent stages of the legend show that this traditional interpretation is over simplified. It is stated that, disgusted at the vile act of Prajapati, Rudra discharged an arrow at him, whereupon Prajāpati was pierced and his semen (*retas*) fell upon the ground. Why is there reference to the semen of Prajapati? Then it is stated that the semen was seen by Bhaga and at once he became blind. Why was it seen by him and why did he become blind? Again it is stated that the semen was tasted by Pusan as a result of which he lost his teeth. Why did such things happen? Had it been a simple case of incest the matter could be ended with the punishment of Prajapati. Why then Bhaga and Pusan had to suffer? According to the *Aitareya* version of the story, the daughter, before her union with Prajapati, assumed the shape of a *rohita* (*rohitam bhūtam*). The word *rohita* has been translated as doe, but according to Sayana it means *menstruous*: *rohitam lohitah bhūtā prāptā ṛtumatī jātetyarthah*. This reminds us of the menstrual rites, (See Ch V) associated with vegetation and fertility, current in different parts of the world.[88] So it appears that the legend with which we are dealing refers to a very old ritual, the significance of which could not be understood even in

86 III 33-34
87 VIII 2 10
88. See my *Indian Puberty Rites*, Calcutta 1968, pp. 5ff.

the age of the Brahmana literature The same legend is found in the *Rgveda* in which Rudra is described as playing the part of Prajapati[89] There it is stated that Rudra had sexual union with his daughter Usa but this was not regarded as incestuous "The semen, capable of producing heroic children, increased and was about to overflow He, then, for the welfare of beings, discharged that He infused that semen into the body of his own beautiful daughter When the father conceived such passion for his own youthful daughter, he united with her and she extracted much semen from the copulation That semen was infused into a lofty frame, the container of good deeds When the father made sexual intercourse with his own daughter *he did that with the earth* and infused semen therein The intelligent gods made the Brahman out of it and created Vāstospati, the protector of rites" So we find that the attitude of the *Rgveda* towards the father's union with his daughter is basically different from that of the Brāhmana literature

The story of Prajapati's union with his own daughter has come down to us in an extremely mutilated form and in the Brāhmana literature it has been much fabricated with theological speculations and sacrificial technicalities However, in spite of everything, the fact remains that Prajapati was killed after a ritual intercourse with a woman, supposed to be his own daughter In the same way, Pururavas was also sacrificed after his union with Urvasī Reference may be made in this connexion to the Puranic episode of king Vena who was slain on account of his wickedness according to the traditional interpretations[90] But the most interesting feature of the Vena episode is that when his body was given to the sacrifice, he was reborn in a new form The rise of Pṛthu from the body of Vena obviously implies that the god king was put to death to be replaced by a successor of unimpaired vitality Interestingly enough, Vena is described as a god in the *Rgveda*[91] who was sacrificed and thus became a *gandharva* after his ritual intercourse with a celestial nymph

## 15 Epilogue: Birth of Literature

Referring to the Purusamedha sacrifice,[92] Eggeling remarks

89 X. 61 5-7
90 Cf *Mbh*, Śānti LIX.
91 X. 123 4-7
92 *Sat Br*, XIII 6 1 2 *Sān S S* XVI 10 1 21, *Vaitāna Sutras* XXXVII 10-26

"In fact it is nothing more than what Śāṅkhāyana appears to claim for it, *viz.* an adaptation, and that a comparative modern adaptation of existing Aśvamedha ritual".[93] Though the form in which it is reproduced in the Brāhmaṇa and the Sūtra literature does not appear to be so archaic, yet there are grounds to believe that the Aśvamedha was originally the Puruṣamedha in which a man was sacrificed instead of the horse after his ceremonial intercourse with the queen. The very fact that the whole ritual of Aśvamedha was included in the Puruṣamedha[94] proves that both were identical in the beginning but later branched off in two directions, the former being taken by the royal class. Purusamedha could be performed by any wealthy individual. The list of different classes of human victims to be offered in the Puruṣamedha sacrifices, as we find in the Brāhmaṇa literature, proves that such victims could be bought or managed from the conquered and exploited peoples.

A few other points should be explained here in connexion with the Aśvamedha sacrifice. In the earlier stage of the Aśvamedha sacrifice, a Brāhmaṇa and a Kṣatriya lute-player used to sing stanzas composed by themselves in honour of the king and the Hotṛ used to relate a 'revolving legend' in a ten days' cycle all the year round. Winternitz points out that germs of later literature can be traced to these recitals.[95] But why such things formed part of the ritual? An oversimplified answer may be given at once. These were recited or sung in the honour of the king for his performance of such a big affair as the Aśvamedha. But things are not really what they seem.

I have a book in Bengali on the early history of world literature. The most interesting fact that had come to my notice while I was writing the book was that all the ancient great literary works were tragedies and that they were all composed in verses with the purpose of singing or reciting before an audience. The relation was not between individual writer and reader, but a collective relation in which the speaker and the audience used to feel the same emotion. The same tradition is not completely lost even today, at least in places where literature has not become entirely sophisticated, individualised and urbanised. Poetry, music and dance were originally undifferentiated, and at that time it was not an art of

93. *Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. XLIV, p. XLIV.
94. *Śān. S. S.*, XVI-10. 2. 3.
95. *History of Indian Literature*, Vol. I, p. 272.

leisure, it was a guide to action 'designed to effect some change in the external world to impose illusion on reality'.[96] "The melodies of the *Sāmaveda* were looked upon as possessing magic power even as late as in the Brahmanical times There is a ritual book belonging to the *Sāmaveda* called *Sāmavidhāna Brāhmana* the second part of which is a regular handbook of magic, in which the employment of various *Sāmans* for various purposes is taught "[97] Singing is still a technique of work, as we find in reaping the harvest, in sailing the boats, in patting the roofs, in sinking the tubewells, in carrying the logs Dance was the first to secede from the undifferentiated trio and the next to do the same was melody

The earliest form of literature was thus quite different in purpose It was a guide to action The Asvamedha, as we have seen, was a composite ritual connected with the increase of production The undifferentiated poetry, music and dance was thus an essential feature of the original ritual, though in subsequent ages its purpose was changed Besides the stanzas of the lute-players or the legends of the Hotṛ, there were other literary items connected with the Aśvamedha Reference should be made in this connexion to the dialogues between the priests and the queens These were the earliest form of drama, the dialogues being designed to imitate certain original performances Already in the *Ṛgveda* we have references to the dialogue-hymns which were clearly meant to be acted Mention should be made in this connexion of RV. I 165 (Agastya, Indra, and the Maruts), I 179 (sexual dialogue of Agastya and Lopāmudrā), III 33 (Viśvāmitra and the rivers), IV 18 (Indra, Aditi and Vāmadeva), X 10 (Yama and Yamī), X 14 (funeral rite), X 95 (Urvasī and Purūravas), X 108 (Saramā and the Paṇis), X 135 (Yama and Kumāra, the nucleus of the later legend of Yama and Naciketas) Most of the Ṛgvedic hymns are meant to be chanted by one or more priests, but these dialogue hymns are of more importance since they are meant to be performed or mimed before a group of persons assembled for a certain purpose The dialogue of the priest and the queen, as is found in the *Vājasaneyi Samhitā* in connexion with the Aśvamedha, is likewise meant to be part of a ritual act performed by two characters representing the principles and is thus a substitution for an earlier, actual sacrifice of the male

96 See Thomson *Studies in Ancient Greek Society* Vol I, pp 439-40
97 Winternitz, *op cit* Vol I, p 167

# II

# THE KING AND THE DICE

## A Study in the Rituals of the Rājasūya

### 1. Prologue: Purpose of the Study

In our study in the rituals of the Aśvamedha we have seen that there developed a gulf of difference between the basic and sophisticated forms of the Vedic Yajñas or sacrifices, that the original principles of sacrifice did not differ essentially from those of magic and that, with the change in the technique of production resulting in the rise of class society and state power on the ruins of tribal equality, primitive magic transformed itself into the esoteric art of the ruling or privileged class We have also seen that the general character of the Vedic texts reflects a society based upon class division, although here and there in the same texts are found relics of an undifferentiated pre-class society through which the Vedic tribes had to pass their earlier stages, and in view of this we have tried to explain how a collective agricultural ritual like the Aśvamedha became in later times the sole affair of a king and began to be looked upon as a symbol of royal greatness The purpose of the present chapter is also same, to unlock the closed door of ancient Indian social history with the essentials of the Rājasūya as the key, since we believe that the study of any cult or ritual *in itself* is of no value unless it is used as a means to understand the vast and enormously complicated problems of Indian social history

### 2. Some Important Features of Rājasūya

As is known to all students of ancient Indian history, the Rājasūya was one of the principal ceremonies of royal inauguration It consisted of a long succession of sacrificial performances which begin on the first day of *phālguna* (February-March, the spring time of India) and spread over a period covering at least two years The details of the Rājasūya are found in the *Śatapatha*

*Brahmana*[1] Its main features, as summed up by Prof H C Ray-chaudhuri, are as follows [2]

(1) *Ratninām havimsi* or presents to the divinities of the *Ratnins* (the bejewelled ones or those possessed of the jewel offering or the aristocratic class) The *Ratnins* consisted of the *Senānī* (the Commander of the Army), the *Purohita* (Royal Chaplain), the *Mahiṣī* (Chief Queen), the *Sūta* (Charioteer and Bard), the *Grāmani* (Leader of the Host or Village Headman), the *Samgrahitr* (Treasurer), the *Ksatr* (Chamberlain), the *Bhagadugha* (Collector of the Royal Share, i e Taxes), the *Aksavapa* (Keeper of the Dice), the *Go Vikartana* (lit Cutter up of Cattle, i e , the King's Companion in the Chase) and the *Pālāgala* (Courier)

(2) *Abhiṣecaniya* or besprinkling ceremony which began with offering to Savitr, Agni, Soma, Brhaspati, Indra Rudra, Mitra and Varuna The consecration water (*abhiṣecaniya āpah*) was made up of seventeen kinds of liquid including the water from the river Sarasvati, sea water, and water from a whirlpool, a pond, a well and dew The sprinkling was performed by a Brāhmana priest, a kinsman or brother of the king elect, a friendly Rājanya and a Vaiśya

(3) *Dig-Vyāsthāpana* or the king's symbolical walking towards the various quarters as an indication of his universal rule

(4) Treading upon a tiger s skin thus gaining the strength and the pre eminence of the tiger

(5) Enthronement

(6) A mimic cow raid against a relative or a sham fight with a member of the ruling aristocracy

(7) Narration by the *holy* priest of the story of Sunahsepa of the *Aitareya Brhamana* VII 13 ff

(8) A game of dice in which the king takes part

Of the aforesaid eight items, the first five, *viz* offerings to the household deities of the privileged persons, besprinkling ceremony, king's symbolical walk, treading upon the tiger s skin and enthronement, belong evidently to the sophisticated stage of the Rajasūya, and they are quite in accordance with the principles of royal inauguration of the later Vedic age These were rituals through which the king was consecrated after his election [3] These rituals reflect

1 V 2 3 9ff, *Sacred Books of the East* XLI, pp 42 113

2 *Pol tical History of Ancient India* Calcutta 1953 pp 165ff

3 Cf *Śatapatha Br* V 3 3 ff *Pañcavimsa Br* XVIII 8 ff , *Ta ti rīya Br* 1 7 5 *Aitareya Br* VIII 5 ff

the ideal of monarchy and that of a class society The rise of class society and state power on the ruins of pre class tribal life is a significant historical process and one of our main aims in these pages is to throw light on this subject Very frequently many of our historians use such terms as 'tribe', 'tribal king', 'tribal coin', etc without caring to understand the real nature of tribal society and the process of its disintegration yielding to the rise of the state The three other rituals of the Rājasūya—the mimic cow raid, narration of the story of Sunahśepa and the game of dice—are likely to supply us valuable data relating to the growth of class society and the establishment of kingship in ancient India

## 3. The Mimic Cow Raid

In our study in the ritual of the Asvamedha we have argued that the early Rgvedic tribes were purely pastoral, and this point is indeed significant "The growth of private ownership", writes George Thomson,[4] "derived a powerful impetus from the domestication of cattle. Game is perishable and land is immovable, but wealth in the form of cattle is durable and easy to steal or to exchange Being necessarily nomadic, pastoral tribes are quick to increase their wealth by cattle raids and war, and since warfare, which had grown out of hunting, was waged by the men, it reinforced the tendency already *inherent in pastoral society, for wealth to accumulate in their* hands Constantly on the move, these turbulent tribes plunder one district after another The male captives are killed, the women are carried off as chattels, their skill at the loom being measured in terms of cattle But warfare requires unity of leadership, and consequently these tribes develop a type of kingship not magical, but military In reward for their successful leadership, the kings receive the lion's share of the spoils, and the wealth thus amassed promotes social inequalities which shake the whole fabric of tribal society, beginning at the top "

The importance attached to the possession of cattle is shown by numerous passages of the *Rgveda* The word *go* denoting the cow is used as one of the synonyms for *pṛthivī* the earth According to the *Nighaṇṭu*,[5] nine other terms were also used to denote the cow

4 *Aeschylus and Athens* London 1950 p 37 Cf *Supra* Ch I Sec. 12 pp 14-15
5 II 11

Even in the *Rgveda*[6] the gods are invoked as offsprings of the cows and the poets do not hesitate to compare their songs with the lowing of the cows[7] or to designate the starry heaven after the term *gāvah* [8] We have many passages in the *Rgveda* referring to forays for cattle So common were such raids that the word *ga iṣṭi* indicating 'battle for cattle' came to denote any 'conflict' or 'battle' The Bhāratas are frequently described as a host desirous of cows [9] The *Rgveda* is in fact burdened with the events of cattle raids and, as Dr D R Das has shown,[10] such events were common even in historical times at least the ancient tradition of *go-grahana* was maintained by Indian kings as one of the features of their royal duties

The character of Indra, as depicted in the *Rgveda* is that of an unscrupulous war leader of the pastoral peoples—an ideal king of later times—plundering one district after another for the sake of cattle wealth He manifests his character not so much as the pro tector, but as the lifter of cattle [11] His help is sought for seizing the cattle of the enemies[12] like the Kikaṭas [13] He is invoked as the discoverer of concealed cows [14] He seizes the cattle of the Dasyus and releases them from the *goṣṭha* [15] There is reason to believe that the Rgvedic episode, in which Indra forcibly released the cows kept by the Panis in mountain forts, has a factual basis [16] In one episode Indra is seen releasing the cows after having killed Vrtra [17] He boasts of killing Vṛtra giving all his cows to Trita, plundering the wealth of the Dasyus and driving all the cows to Dadhica and Matari svan [18] In another place it is stated that Trita, being sent by Indra fought and killed Trisiras with the weapons of his father and obtained all the cows of Tvastr s son Visvarupa who was be

6 VI 50 11 etc
7 VII 32 22 VII 106 1 IX 22 2 etc
8 I 156 6 VII 36 1
9 Cf. III 31 10 See Ch I Sec. 10 p. 14
10 *Go-grahana in Social Life in Ancient Ind a* (ed D C Sircar Calcutta 1971) pp 30 38
11 III 44 5 IV 17 11 VI 17 1 VI 26 2 X. 38 1 X. 48 4
12 IV 31 13 VI 35 2 VI 42 2 VIII 21 11 X. 24 14 etc.
13 III 54 14
14 IV 28 5
15 IV 19 7 VI 45 4
16 III 31 6 VI 39 2 VI 44 22 VI 73 1 3 VII 9 2 IX. 22 7 IX. 111 2 X 62 2 X. 67 3-8 X. 68 2 11 X 108
17 I 32 12 V 86 3 VIII 3 19 X. 89 7
18 X. 48 2

headed by Indra [19]

Such examples of Indra's exploits can be multiplied Since cattle was the form of wealth, to be increased by raids and wars, successful leadership in cattle-raids was regarded as one of the essential qualifications for the candidature of 'kingship' in the early Vedic age. There is reason to believe, as we shall see in a subsequent section, that kingship in that age was in most of the cases elective, although the conception of hereditary kingship was gaining ground The Vedic tribes were getting detribalized, owing to the changes in the mode of production caused by the introduction of Higher Pastoralism. In the *Rgveda*, however, the term for war-chief was *rājā* which later on came to mean 'king' The comparatively modern meaning of the word had led some of our scholars to discover *kings* and *monarchs* in the *Rgveda* But this conclusion, as we shall see later, is based upon a wrong understanding Nevertheless, it must be remembered in this connection that it took several centuries to get the whole of the *Rgveda* composed and that this long period must have witnessed a great social transformation, a qualitative transition from the pre-class to class divided society

In view of what we have stated above, we are now in a position to understand why a mimic cow raid was an essential ritual of the Rājasūya All rituals are symbols of earlier social realities The mimic cow raid is therefore an *illusory technique*, founded on the primitive magical notion that by creating the *illusion* one can actually control the *reality* [20] Accordingly, the sacrificer, who has been elected 'king' for his successful leadership in the war or is holding his office as the descendant of such a 'king' previously elected, places a hundred or more than a hundred cows of one of his relatives to the north of the *āhavanya* and takes part in a sham fight He stops his chariot in the midst of cows guarded by a Rājanya with a bow in hand The king then shoots his arrow at him and having thus, as it were, overpowered the enemy, he wheels round Then he touches the cow with the end of his bow saying 'Together with energy, I overpower them I seize them' [21]

## 4. The Word Rajā: Its Original and Changed Meaning

The mimic cow raid is therefore an imitation of the actual cow

19 X. 8. 8-9
20 Cf *Supra*, Ch. I, Sec. 8 p 11
21 *Sat. Br*, V 4 3 1 2, *SBE*, XLI, pp. 93-101

raids of the earlier pastoral tribes Our main line of approach is that successful leadership in such raids was once regarded as an essential qualification for the ruler and that in a later period when the institution of kingship in the modern sense was established, the kings in the time of royal inauguration used to mime those feats which they or their predecessors once performed in reality But this conclusion will be of no value unless it is brought in relation to the bigger problem of the growth of the institution of kingship in the Vedic age

Many scholars have spoken of the 'Vedic tribes and described their social and political institutions *without trying to understand what the tribal society really is* A few words should therefore be spoken in this connection The tribe is composed of a number of clans, and its affairs are conducted by a tribal council composed of the elected chiefs from different clans Likewise the affairs of a clan are conducted by the clan assembly composed of all the adult members of the clan In a word, the tribal administration is maintained at all levels by democratic institutions, like the tribal council, the clan assembly, and so on '[22] If the Vedic peoples were originally organised in tribes, it is logical to assume that they also must have once passed through a stage of similar democratic organisation And this should be the basis of the study of the social and political institutions of the Vedic peoples, a point which has been clearly ignored True, the terms *Sabha, Samiti* and *Vidatha* indicating 'popular assemblies according to the modern interpretation are widely discussed subjects, but what has not been discussed in connection with the said institutions is their real social and political role during the period under review

Owing to this gross misunderstanding of the tribal institutions, the historian has no hesitation in stating that "the tribes of the *Rgveda* were certainly under kingly rule there is no passage in the *Rgveda* which suggests any other form of government, while the king under the style *rajan* is a frequent figure [23] As Chattopadhyaya has rightly observed Evidently, the scholars who have discovered 'monarchy' among the Vedic tribes are misled by the word *rajan* This is clear from the way *The Vedic Age* (*History and Culture of the Indian People,* Vol I, ed R C Majumdar) has echoed the *Cambridge History* 'as

22 L. H. Morgan *Ancient Society* pp 71 ff
23 *Cambridge History of India* I p 94

a general rule, monarchy was the system of government prevailing in this age The term *rājan*, king or chieftain, is of frequent occurrence in the *Rgveda*' The premise is true but the conclusion untenable the word *rājan* is there in the *Rgveda* but it does not prove the existence of a monarchical form of government We shall mention here two decisive evidences Even in the latest stratum of the *Rgveda* we come across the epithet *raja vratasya*, and this is a synonym for *ganasya senānih* This means nothing but the tribal chief Secondly, one of the famous battles was referred by the *Rgveda* as *dāsarājña*, under the set idea that *rājā* could mean nothing but the king, this is taken to mean the *battle of the ten kings* But who were the ten *kings*? In preparing the list of these so called *kings* even the contributor of the *Cambridge History* was frankly obliged to use the word 'tribe' instead 'Of the ten tribes five are of little note, the Alinas the Pakthas the Bhalanases the Sivas and the Visānins Better known in the *Rgveda* are the other five, the Anus the Druhyus the Turvaśas and Yadus and the Purus' If those were tribes, then the battle amongst them *could not be* a battle of the 'ten kings' And if this were so, the use of the word *rajan* in the *Rgveda* is far from being a sure proof of hereditary monarchy"[24]

## 5. The Election of the 'Kings'· The Popular Pressure

"The ceremony of the Rajasūya or royal consecration," says Keith,[25] "hints at recollections of an elective kingship by the consent of the people' What we are trying to suggest on the basis of the available data is that the *rājas* of the *Rgveda* could not have been kings of the later times They were, like the chiefs of tribal society, definitely elected by the people. The clearest reference to the *rājā* being elected by the people is found in the *Atharvaveda*[26] "The hyperboles of the Vedic poets", says Chattopadhyaya[27] "appear to be all the more exaggerated by modern translator's preoccupations with the later ideas Beneath all these overgrowths, however, the tribal custom of the people electing the chief and the chief in turn sharing out the wealth among the people are evident enough" The evidence of the clan council and tribal assemblies in the *Rgveda*

24 D Chhattopadhyaya *Lokayata* Delhi 1968 pp 593-94
25 *Religion and Philosophy of the Veda* Cambridge 1925 p. 481
26 III 4 2
27 *op cit*, p 591

shows that the Vedic people were largely at the tribal stage in which there was no place for hereditary kingship Of course, with the disintegration of the tribal organisation, it became customary to elect chiefs from the same family which ultimately resulted in hereditary succession and finally kingship in the modern sense of the term

Many passages of the *Aitareya Brāhmana* speak of the election and consecration of rulers[28] The expression *rāja kartṛ* (king maker)[29] points to the important part played by officials including headmen of villages in the choice of the ruler In the *Śatapatha Brāhmana*[30] the persons specified as *rāja kartṛ* or *rājakṛt* are the Sūta and the Grāmani Prof R K Mookerji observes "It is apparent from the lists of persons aiding in the royal coronation that both official and non official or popular elements were represented in the function"[31] In the *Aitareya Brāhmana*[32] emphasis is laid on the possession of moral qualities The leader on whom the choice falls is *ojiṣṭha, baliṣṭha, sahiṣṭa, sattimah, pārayiṣnutama* and *dharmaina* We have evidence that the peoples sometimes expelled and even executed their rulers together with unpopular officials The *Aitareya Brāhmana*[33] refers to rulers who were expelled from their states The *Śatapatha Brāhmana*[34] says that the Sṛjñayas expelled their hereditary ruler together with the *sthapati* In later Jataka literature there are numerous references to the power of the people to depose a king and elect another[35]

That the real power was with the people is proved by the testimony of the *Atharvaveda*[36] where it is stated that concord between king and assembly was essential In the *Jaiminīya Upaniṣad Brāhmana*[37] we find references to the *Pariṣad,* the *Sabha* and the *Samsad* where people used to meet It refers to the disputations (*Samvāda*) and witnesses (*Upadraṣtr*) in connection with the popular assemblies

These organisations were same as the *Samiti* or the *Parisad* of the Upanisads and served as the general body of the people (*Janah*),

28 U N Ghosal *A History of Hindu Political Theories* 1927, p 26
29 *Ait Br* VIII 17 *Śat Br* III 4 1 7
30 III 4 1 7, XIII 2 18
31 *The Fundamental Unity of India*, p 83
32 VIII 12
33 VIII 10
34 XII 9 3 1 ff
35 Nos 73, 247 378 401 462 529 etc
36 VI 88 3
37 II 11 4, III 7 6

an assembly of the whole people[38] The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*[39] mentions the *Samiti* of the Pañcālas, while the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka*[40] uses the term *Pariṣad* instead of *Samiti* The analogy of the Licchavi *Pariṣā* and of similar assemblies mentioned in Buddhist works shows that the functions and powers of the *Pariṣads* were by no means insignificant

## 6. The Tribal Councils

The examples, mentioned above, are carefully selected from the post-Rgvedic literature belonging to the period when the institution of kingship was spreading its root in the class divided soil of India Even then the ancient democratic institutions, the popular assemblies did *not cease to function, although their importance was going to be* minimised, as is natural to expect The decay of the old tribal, and hence democratic, assemblies was complete in the period represented by the Great Epic Hopkins[41] says "The earliest assembly for adjusting political affairs in Aryan India was the clan assembly, called *sabhā* (cf the German *sippe*) Where the people met 'in assemblies' to discuss political matters, we may perhaps see a trace *of the original function of the people's assembly, though such a* meeting had, of course, long ceased to be what the *sabhā* had been—a village assembly for counsel—and corresponds neither to the regular *sabhā* of the old nor the antique state council in which the king took part (*samiti*), *the latter having now become a meeting place* of the nobles and king The assembly of the people had become an assembly of nobles The military power of the people had quite become the possession of the king In all public matters appertaining to the story itself, the priests are as good as silent, and the people are suppressed '

But the picture was different in the age of the *Ṛgveda* The *Ṛgveda* as a whole is a literature of a long transitional period retaining on the one hand memories and relics of the pre-class society and on the other foreshadowing the realities of class society In any case, as it is natural to expect, the democratic institutions with their original tribal character must have survived with greater vigour

38. Raychaudhuri, *op cit.*, p. 174
39 V 3. 1
40. VI 2 1
41 *JAOS*, XIII pp. 143-51

Vedic texts to say on this point? What were the forms of division in the pre class society and what were those in the earlier phases of class society? Does the *Rgveda* help us in understanding these problems? How was the custom of equal division abolished with the further growth and consolidation of class society? Do the functions of royal consecration, as found in later literature, contain relics of such vanished customs? Is there in the Rājasuya any act or miming of any act which presents an illusion of such a lost reality?

## 7. Aksa and Rta

We should not fail to recall in this connection that *sabha* was the place for the distribution of wealth, as we have seen above, and that one of the names of the dice and the dicer was *sabhāsthanu* Sabhā and Sabhāsthānu therefore may not be unconnected, and in view of this we can reasonably raise the question whether dicing or casting the lot had anything to do with the primitive distribution of wealth whether the king's taking part in the ritual dicing was an *illusory* survival of the lost *reality* of equal distribution of wealth through *casting the lot*

The following is what the king had to do with the dice in the Rajasuya "He then throws the five dice into his hand with (*Vājasaneyi Samhitā* X 28) 'Dominant thou art may these five regions of thine prosper', now that one, the *Kali*, is indeed dominant over the (other) dice, for that one dominates over all the dice therefore he says, 'Dominant thou art may these five regions of thine prosper', for there are indeed five regions, he thereby causes to prosper for him"[54] Descriptions of the ritual use of dice at the Agnyādheya and the Rājasuya ceremonies are also found in other works[55]

It appears that although in later times dicing was reduced to gambling, its original purpose was different The *Akṣa sūkta* (X 34) belongs to the later portion of the *Rgveda* and it has very little to do with ritual-dicing But there are certain indications in this *sūkta* which we should not overlook. The entire hymn is a combination of two different themes, one of which is ecstatic praise of *Akṣa* in connection with *agriculture* while the other is designed to denounce

54 *Śat Br*, V 4 4 6, *Sacred Books of the East*, XLI, p 106.

55 *Maitrāyanī Samhitā* IV 4 6, *Taittirīya Br*, I 7 10 3 *Kātyāyana Śrauta Sutra* XV 7 5 ff, *Āpastamba Śrauta Sūtra* XVIII 18 16 ff, *Bhudhāyana Śrauta Sūtra* II 8. 9, etc.

*Akṣa* in connection with *gambling* According to Sāyana, the deity of this *sukta* is *akṣa kṛṣiprasamsā akṣa kitava nindā ca*, i e, 'the praise of the lot as (related to) agriculture (*kṛṣi*) and also the denunciation of the lot as (related to) gambling (*kitava*)' The praise of agriculture shows that the hymn was composed at a later period The pastoral Vedic peoples resorted to agriculture at a considerably late period However, we shall presently see that the lot or *akṣa* was *not designed by the early Vedic people for the exclusive purpose of gambling*

In several passages of the later Samhitās and Brahmanas, lists are given of expressions connected with dicing[56] Of such names Kṛta, Tretā, Dvāpara and Kali (=Abhibhu and Akṣarāja)[57] are significant These are well known names of the mythical ages of India, from which it may be presumed that in each of the 'supposed ages' dicing underwent some changes in purpose and form The change took place from time to time in accordance with the corresponding social changes Lüders shows that in a considerable number of passages in the *Rgveda* Kṛta means a 'throw' (not 'a stake' or 'what is won') and this sense is clearly found in the *Atharvaveda*[58]

It is interesting to note that in the *Atharvaveda* the *Akṣa* is connected with Varuna and Ṛta "King Varuna sees through all that is between the heaven and the earth, and all that is beyond He has counted the winkings of men's eyes As a (winning) gamester puts down his dice, thus does he establish these (laws) '[59] Thus the establishment of Varuna's laws is conceived in terms of dicing The relation between Aksa and Ṛta is also anticipated in the Akṣa sūkta of the *Rgveda*[60] *Yo vah senānirmahato ganasya rājā vrātasya prathamo vabhūva tasmai kṛnomi na dhanā runadhmi daśāham prācistadṛtam vadāmi* Here the Akṣa is conceived as the leader of *gana* and the first chief (*rājā*) of the *vrāta* The poet having addressed the Akṣa in such terms declares that he is not withholding wealth With his ten fingers stretched he is speaking the *Rta*

The promise of *not withholding the wealth in the name of Rta* indicates something other than gambling As Macdonell and Keith[61] have

56 *Taittirīya Sam* IV 3 3 1-2 *Vaj Sam* XXX 18 *Taitt. Br* III 4 1 16
57 *Cf Śat Br*, V 4 4 6 Macdonell and Keith, *Vedic Index* I p 3
58. Macdonell and Keith *op cit*, p. 3
59 *AV* IV 16, 5, *Sacred Books of the East* XLII p. 63.
60 X. 34 12
61 *Vedic Index* I p. 3

pointed out, the Vedic gods were compared to the throws of dice as giving or destorying wealth, and such conceptions, as we shall see later, were not without any social basis However, the most interesting point in the Rgvedic passage is the conception of the *Akṣa* as the leader of *gana* and *vrāta*, the tribal collective That the term *gana* evidently denoted 'tribe' has been proved by numerous references to it in the same sense in ancient literature, and since scholars are more or less unanimous in this interpretation, there is no need of any further discussion on this point Kātyāyana[62] said that the words *serni*, *puga*, *gana* *vrāta* and *samgha* meant *samūha* or *varga*, i e 'group' Interestingly, Sayana in his commentary on the said Aksa sukta of the *Rgveda* has equated *gana* with *vrāta*

Thus the Aksa sukta itself points at the tribal character of the original dicing It also contains the relics of the very old social characteristic that wealth should not be withheld, because that would go against the principles of *Rta* Evidently these were the social values prior to the development of the conflict between social wealth and individual appropriation In the earlier stages of class society, when the tribal organisations disintegrated the king although he had by this time established his individual right on the large portion of social wealth, paid lip loyalty to the ancient tribal customs This explains why in the Rājasuya the king took the dice in his own hand The dice were the symbol of ancient social justice, the ideals of which the king was expected to uphold

## 8 Rta and Varuna

Evidently dice were the symbol of ancient social justice and as we shall see later, casting the lot was a means of equal distribution of wealth in early Vedic times But before reaching this point we shall have to deal with some kindred subjects which are likely to substantiate our hypothesis as parts of circumstantial evidence The *Akṣa* as we have seen above, is connected with *Rta* in the *Rgveda* as well as the *Atharvaveda* But what is this Rta? According to Winternitz[63], *Rta* is the 'order of the Universe' while Macdonell[64] takes it to mean the 'physical and moral order' Keith[65] thinks it to

62 P V Kane *History of Dharmasāstra* II p 66
63 *History of Indian Literature* I p. 154
64 *History of Sanskrit Literature* London 1905 p 75
65 *Religion and Philosophy of the Veda* p 248

be a term for the cosmic as well as the moral order According to Radhakrishnan "*Rta* literally means 'the course of things'. It stands for law in general and the immanence of justice This conception must have originally been suggested by the regularity of the movement of the sun, moon and stars, the alternations of day and night, of the seasons *Rta* denotes the order of the world Everything that is ordered in the universe has *Rta* for its principles It corresponds to the *Universals* of Plato The world of experience is a shadow or reflection of the *Rta*, the permanent reality which remains unchanged in all the welter of mutation'[66]

But such interpretations of the *Rta* are one sided There is no doubt that *Rta* stood for a peculiar complex of moral and physical laws But this is not all *Rta* also stood for other principles which all these great scholars have unfortunately overlooked One point which should be stressed is that the Vedic poets eventually *felt the loss of Rta and strongly urged for its revival* If it were exclusively the physical and cosmic laws, there was no need of such lamenting At the same time it is interesting to note that in the post-vedic literature the conception of *Rta* is practically absent In the principal Upaniṣads the word occurs only seven times[67] This shows that *Rta* originally stood for a different set of principles which was consistent with the early Vedic way of life, but eventually those principles were undermined and annihilated and some poets dreamt of their revival in vain Now, what were the principles for which *Rta* stood originally?

Chattopadhyaya tried to give an answer to this question having demonstrated the material basis of *Rta* from the Rgvedic passages According to him, "the *Rta* assured the poets their cows, their water, their food, and in fact everything they considered as constituting material wealth Being thus intimately connected with the essentially practical considerations, the concept of *Rta* was yet to acquire any spiritual significance Rta, the order of nature, was also understood by the poets and their kinsmen as the most potent force assuring them of their means of subsistence'[69] How *Rta* assured the people their cows, their water, their food, their material wealth and other means of subsistence has been shown in numerous passages of the

66 *Indian Philosophy* I pp 78 79
67 *Taittirīya* I 1 1, I 9 1 I 12 1 II 4 1, III 1 6, *Katha* III 1, V 2
68 *Lokāyata* pp 622 ff
69 *ibid*, p 628

*Rgveda*[70] 'The holdings of the *Rta* are fast, the manifold forms of the *Rta* are delightful, the praisers desire abundant food of the *Rta*, by virtue of the *Rta* cows are obtained, and they (the cows) enter into the *Rta* Having pleased the *Rta* the praisers gain strength and water, the earth does yield the best cows only for the sake of the *Rta* and it is vast and incommensurable because of the *Rta* '[71] There are many more passages like this

Rgvedic passages relating to the *Rta* convincingly prove that the said concept had direct or indirect bearing on the process of obtaining means of subsistence The moral aspects of *Rta* have been emphasised by the scholars and the source of this moral order has been traced to the physical order But there is nothing in the *Rgveda* to prove that human morality has its roots in human reason and that the latter in its turn is a reflection of the law governed universe In the nineteenth century Europe it was believed that rising out of the background of the law governed physical universe human being is essentially rational and hence moral And this belief was artificiality imposed upon the Vedic conception of *Rta* But if this artificially is withdrawn, there is no difficulty in finding the *Rta* in its real perspective and in its functional aspects

We shall not therefore be wrong in assuming that the Vedic *Rta* must have originally been what Engels[72] called the *simple moral grandeur of ancient gentile society*, and this explains why the Vedic poets felt the loss of *Rta* for which the breakdown of ancient collective life was responsible Of all the Vedic gods, Mitra and Varuna, especially the latter, had the closest connection with the *Rta* Varuna is *Rtasya gopa*, the guardian of the *Rta*, who, as a moral governor stands far above any other deity "His wrath is roused by sin, the infringement of his ordinances, which he severely punishes (*RV* VII 86 3-4) The fetters (*pāsah*) with which he binds sinners, are often mentioned (I 24 15, etc) They are cast sevenfold and threefold, ensnaring the man who tells lies, passing by him who speaks truth (*AV* IV 16 6) On the other hand, Varuna is gracious to the penitent He unites like a rope and removes sin (II 28 5, V 85 7-8) He releases not only from the sins which men themselves

70 I 132 3, I 141 1, I 151 3-8, II 27 12, III 1 11, III 20 4, III 54 3, III 56 2, III 61 6, IV 2 16, IV 23 8-10, IV 51 7-8, IV 52 2, V 8 1, V 41 1, VII 66 13 , etc

71 IV 23 9 10

72 *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* Moscow 1952, p 163

political and administrative spheres, as we have already seen, the institutions found in Vedic literature, are clear relics of pre class tribal survivals In the economic sphere, as regards production and distribution, the same also holds good In RV VII 76 5, a clear picture of primitive communism is found 'being united with the *common cattle* they become of one mind they strive together as it were, nor do they injure the rituals of the gods nor injuring each other they move with wealth' Here are a few of other examples of collective ownership along with a significant reference to the past '*As in the past* he (Agni) generated the *common wealth* (for the living beings)' [77] 'Let the *common cow* be moving swiftly' [78] 'We invoke Indra, the custodian of *common wealth* and the giver of wealth for protection' [79] 'O Agni, your brilliance comes to us and you brought the cows of *Rta* equally to us' [80] Such examples can be multiplied to show that the *Rgveda* during the long period of its composition witnessed the transition from pre class to class society and that it actually contains the relics of ancient collectivity and equality The concluding verses of the *Rgveda* are really significant The poet is lamenting for the life that is lost, trying to revive the memory of the past, which is imagined to restore the bliss of *equality and unity* once enjoyed by the Vedic peoples of the earlier age

## 10. Distribution: Casting the Lot

Now we are in a position to answer why the king in the Rājasūya had to mime an act of dicing Casting the lot was one of the primitive means of equal distribution of wealth, and the king of a later age—although he was too powerful—at least formally took an oath that he would maintain the inviolable *Rta*, the spirit of ancient equality and justice, and his taking part in ritual dicing can only be explained in this sense Casting the lot was indeed the best means of distribution, because the commodities gathered as collective wealth of the tribe, to be distributed among the clans, had no *fixed value* in the modern economic sense, since costing was then unknown Thus

77 RV III 2 12
78 VI 26 1
79 VIII 99 8.
80 I 141 1

*bhāgya* (lot) was a means of *bhāga* (share)

In Greek context George Thomson[81] has analysed the system of casting the lot as a means of equal distribution and his researches throw important light on what still remains obscure in Vedic literature He shows that the ancient system of casting the lot gave rise to the conception of the goddess Moira "The basic meaning of the word *moira* is a share or portion With *moira* is associated another word, *lachos*, a portion given or received by the process of casting lots One of the Moirai (goddess of fate) bore the name of Lachesis, the goddess of Allotment In this sense *lachos* is synonymous with *Kleras*, which, commonly used of a lot or holding of a land, originally denoted a piece of wood used for casting lots The land was to be distributed by lot among the tribes, and the territory of each tribe was to be subdivided by lot among the families' or 'clans' Booty was distributed in the same way Plutarch goes on to remark that equality of the common meal was destroyed in course of time by the growth of luxury (he should rather have said the growth of private property) but persisted in the public distribution of meat at state sacrifices It may therefore be concluded that in its application to food, booty and land the idea of Moira reflects the collective distribution of wealth through three successive stages in the evolution of tribal society Oldest of all was the distribution of food, which goes back to the hunting period Next comes the distribution of chattels and inanimate movables acquired by warfare, which was a development of hunting, and, last, the division of land for purposes of agriculture "

Now let us view the Vedic system of distribution in view of what has been stated above Chattopadhyaya[82] points out on the evidence of the *Nighaṇṭu* that words like *brahman*, etc., have originally meant food and material wealth at the same time, thus referring to a period, when the distinction between the idea of food and that of material wealth did not develop The division of food which goes back to the hunting period according to Thomson, is found in a few verses of the *Ṛgveda* Indra is described as the divider of the shares (*bhāga*) of food (*riya*),[83] and as such regarded as the mightiest among the gods[84] But the most significant reference to the division of food

81 *Aeschylus and Athens* pp. 33-44

82 *op cit.* pp. 370-78

83 *RV* III 49 4

84 36.VI 1

along with a distinct mention of *common meal* is found in the *Atharva veda* "Having superiors, intentful, *be ye not divided, accomplishing together, moving on with joint labour*, Come hither speaking what is agreeable one to another, I make you united, like-minded Your drinking (be) the same, *in common your share of food*, in the same harness do I join you together, worship ye Agni united, like spokes about a name "[85]

Evidently these passages refer to a period of primitive communism when collective labour and common meal determined human relationships The next stage was marked, according to Thomson, by the distribution of advanced wealth in the form of cattle, etc, and subsequently that of chattels and inanimate movables acquired by warfare This type of wealth is indicated in the *Rgveda* by the term *varya*, which has been interpreted by Sayana as 'wealth in the form of cattle' (*gavādi dhanānām*) and also as 'wealth in the form of crops (*vrīhi yavādinām*) Although wealth in the form of cattle or crops indicate an advanced, i e, class divided state of social development, the word for wealth still concealed within itself the old communistic conception In its derivative meaning, *vārya* is that (coming from the root *Vṛm*) which is *by nature* divisible Likewise the word *bhaga* stood at the same time for 'wealth' and 'share', thus indicating that there was originally no wealth that was not shared out Division of wealth looted from the aliens occurs frequently in the *Rgveda*,[86] and in many such verses the ancient law of division is stressed Thomson's third category, viz the division of land, is practically absent in the *Rgveda* because, as we have said many times, the early Vedic peoples were predominantly pastoral They were more interested in counting wealth in terms of cattle, and their attention to agriculture was drawn only at a later period [87]

## 11. The Sabhāsthānu

In view of what we have stated above now it is not difficult to understand the function of the *Sabhāsthānu* or the dicer of the Vedic

85 III 30 5 6, Whitney s tr, I pp 138 39
86 I 20 8, I 73 5 I 102 4, I 103 6, I 112 1, I 135 2 3 I 162 3, I 183 4, II 10 6, II 19 5 II 23 2 II 24 14 III 28 4, III 30 18, V 42 5, V 86 5, VI 22 4, VII 56 21, VIII 36 1-6, VIII 96 8, VIII 96 21, X. 51 2, X. 114 3, etc
87. See Ch I Sec. 10, 12

upholder of moral laws But when with the greed of wealth the basis of ancient *Rta*, of tribal morality, was destoryed, when property differences changed the original character of the community, the god was also transformed into a greedy one, a bad fellow, ugly in his insatiable demands As Keith[92] rightly observes "The figure of Varuna does not increase in moral value in the course of the development of the Vedic religion Varuna is remembered as the god who has fetters and becomes in the Brāhmanas a *dreaded god* whose ritual in some measure is assimilated to that of the demons and the dead After the performance of the bath, which ends the Agnistoma sacrifice, the performer turns away and does not look back *to escape from Varuna's notice,*[93] and in the ceremony of that bath when performed after the horse sacrifice, a man of peculiar appearance is driven into the water and an offering made on his head, as being a representative of Varuna[94] this form of the expulsion of evils shows Varuna reduced to a somewhat humble level, and degraded from his Rgvedic eminence "

This Varuna is really the ghost of the Rgvedic Varuna In the Śunahsepha legend of the *Aitareya Brāhmana* which reflects the ugliest aspects of class society, this friend and benefactor of human beings is transformed into an importunate creditor King Hariscandra was sonless He was very eager to have children and desperately promised that if a son was born to him he would sacrifice that child to Varuna Accordingly a son Rohita by name was born to him and at once Varuna demanded his due Hariscandra requested him to wait for ten days Ten days over, Varuna re appeared with his claim This time the king said that a victim is not fit for sacrifice until its teeth appear, and in this way he was able to befool Varuna again and again till Rohita became an adult But Varuna was an importunate creditor He again appeared with his uncanny demand Rohita who had by this time become adult did not want to get himself killed at the sacrifice He took his bow and left the palace The angry and disappointed god, unable to get Rohita in his grasp, sent waters into the belly of the king

three sons—Sunahpuccha, Sunahsepa and Sunolāṅgula Rohita purchased Sunahsepa having given one hundred cows to Ajigarta Varuna had no objection in accepting Sunahsepa as a substitute for Rohita As none was found to bind Sunahsepa to the sacrificial post, his greedy father Ajigarta performed that task when he was offered one hundred cows in addition to the one hundred he had already received And for another one hundred he did not even hesitate to undertake the task of slaughtering his own son

The story, however, did not end in complete tragedy Sunahsepa was saved by the grace of the ancient Vedic deities whom he invoked when he was bound to the sacrificial post What we learn from this story is that Sunahśepa was not the victim of a simple sacrifice He was, in fact, the victim of the greed, selfishness and cruelty of class society It was a society where the gods, like their human proto types, were merciless monsters, men with wealth could do anything and everything, a father, driven by hunger, would sell his son for a hundred cows, bind him for another hundred and slay him for another This was what the Vedic poets categorically said *fall from the Rta—Nirṛti* The sacrificial victim, rather the victim of circumstances, could only thus desire in vain Keep us away from Nirṛti[96] Maddened by the grim forces of this *Nirṛti*, the poet exclaims I ask thee, O Yajña where is the *Rta* of the past gone? Who is the new one that holds it? Where is the *Rta* of yours gone? Where, O gods, is the holding of the *Rta*? Where is the watchfulness of Varuna?[97]

The priests of the Rajasuya were also slaves of king's wealth, unable either to get rid of the regime of *Nirṛti* or to bring back the old days of *Rta*, and what they could do under such circumstances was to recollect the events through which the annihilation of the *Rta* was complete

96. *RV* I 26.9
97 ib, I 105 4-6.

# III

# FOOD AND DRINK

## A Study in the Rituals of the Vājapeya

### 1. Prologue

The rituals of the Vājapeya sacrifice, although represented in a very sophisticated way in later Vedic literature, are really important for the study in the prehistory of the sacrifical cult itself Elsewhere[1] we have argued that the principles underlying the Vedic sacrifices were not basically different from those of magic and that the latter was neither a pseudo science nor an abortive art but a direct means of food production, 'an illusory technique complementary to the deficiencies of the real technique' [2] In fact, the relations between the principles of magic and those of the Vedic rituals have long been recognised and commented on Winternitz, for example, has re marked the following with reference to the hymns of the *Atharvaveda* "Indeed, many of these magic songs, like the magic rites pertaining to them, belong to a sphere of conceptions which, spread over the whole earth, even recur with the most surprising similarity in the most varying peoples of all countries Among the Indians of North America, among the Negro races of Africa, among the Malays and Mongols, among the ancient Greeks and Romans, and frequently still among the peasantry of present day Europe, we find again exactly the same views, exactly the same strange leaps of thought in the magic songs and magic rites, as has come down to us in the *Atharvaveda* of the ancient Indians There are, then, numerous verses in the *Atharvaveda*, which according to their character and often also their contents, differ just as little from the magic formulas of the American Indian medicine-men and Tartar shamans, as from the Merseburg magic maxims, which belong to the spare remains of the

1 Ch I Sec. 8, Ch. II Sec 1

2 G Thomson *Studies in Ancient Greek Society* London 1949, I, p. 38, *Aeschylus and Athens*, London 1941, pp. 13 14

oldest German poetry"[3] But what has not been demonstrated by Winternitz is *the social basis of this identical pattern of tribal* beliefs and practices This we want to do here with special reference to the rituals of the Vājapeya, an agricultural affair which was later transformed into one of the principal ceremonies of royal inauguration In order to account for this transformation *we are led by the proposition that man's consciousness of the external* world is determined by the relation which he establishes with his fellow beings *in the development of production*, and this alone explains why the external world appears so differently to peoples belonging to different levels of culture and even to different classes of a given *society*

## 2. The Vājapeya and the Rājasūya

According to the existing tradition, the Vajapeya was one of the principal ceremonies of royal inauguration which bestowed upon the performer a superior kind of monarchy called *Sāmrajya* According to Eggeling,[4] the reason why this sacrifice had received a special treatment is that, unlike other forms of Soma sacrifice, it had some *striking features indicating its political character According to the* later Sutra literature,[5] the performance of the Vajapeya should be arranged in much the same way as that of the Rājasūya The *Śatapatha Brāhmana* indicates that the Vājapeya is a ceremony of superior value which has probably led Kātyāyana[6] to note that the Rājasuya may be performed by a king who has not yet performed the Vājapeya According to the evidence furnished by the Brāhmana literature, the Rājasūya *confers upon the sacrificer royal dignity* (*rājya*) and the Vājapeya paramount sovereignty (*sāmrājya*) It is also to be noticed *in this connection* that while the Rājasūya was entirely a Ksatriya ceremony, the Vājapeya might be performed even by the Brāhmanas This implies an original non royal character of the ceremony, and that is why Āśvalāyana[7] says that after performing the Vājapeya a king may perform Rājasūya and a Brāhmana the Bṛhaspatisava "With this rule would seem to accord the

3 Winternitz *History of Indian Literature* Calcutta 1927 I p 128
4 Eggeling in *SBE*, XLI *intro*
5 For details see P V Kane *History of Dharmaśāstra* Poona 1941, pp 1206 ff
6 *Kāt S S* XV 1 1 2
7 IX, 9 19

relative value assigned to the two ceremonies in the *Taittirīya Samhitā* (V 6 2 1) and *Brāhmana* (II 7 6 1), according to which the Vāja peya is a *Samratsava* or consecration to the dignity of a paramount sovereign, while the Rājasuya is called a *Varunasava*, i e , according to Sāyana, a consecration to the universal sway wielded by Varuna In much the same sense we have doubtless to understand the rule in which Lātyāyana defines the object of the Vājapeya (VIII II I), viz 'whomsoever the Brāhmanas and kings (or nobles) may place at their head, let him perform the Vajapeya' All these authorities, with the exception of the *Satapatha Brahmana* and Kātyayāna, are thus agreed in making the Vājapeya a preliminary ceremony, performed by a Brāhmana who is raised to the dignity of a purohita, or head priest or by a king who is elected paramount sovereign by a number of petty rajas, this sacrifice being in due time followed by the respective installation and consecration ceremony, viz the *Bṛhaspatisava*, in the case of the Purohita, and the Rājasūya, in that of the king In regard to the *Bṛhaspatisava*, which these authorities place on an equality with the Rājasūya our Brāhmana (i e , *Sata patha*) finds itself in a somewhat awkward position and it gets out of its difficulty (V 2 1 19) by simply identifying the *Bṛhaspatisava* with the Vajapeya, and making the Vajapeya itself to be 'the consecration of Brhaspati' and Kātyāyana (XIV 1 2) compromises matters by combining the two ceremonies in this way that he who performs the Vājapeya is to perform the Brhaspatisava for a fortnight before and after the Vājapeya" [8]

### 3. The Essentials of the Vājapeya[9]

The first important ritual of the Vajapeya is that of collective drinking, a continuation of the preceding *Ṣodaśī* rite in which the sacrificer offers five Vajapeya cups to Indra (uttering *Vāj Sam* IX. 2 4) and also seventeen cups of Soma and seventeen cups of Surā to thirtyfour gods (the traditional thirty three and Prajapati as the thirtyfourth) deposited on earth mounds situated in front of or behind the axle. This is a type of *Ekāha* sacrifice consisting of three services or pressings (*savana*) at each of which certain cups of liquor are drawn, to be ultimately consumed by the priests and sacrificer after

8 Eggeling *op cit.*, p XXV
9 *Śat Br*, X. 1 2 5, V 2 1 2

libations to the respective deities At certain stated times during the performance, hymns are chanted by the Udgātr followed by an appropriate recitation of verses by the Hotr or his assistant The *Vājapeya saman*, the seventeenth chant in addition to the sixteen of the *Sodasī*, is sung in the *Bṛhati* tune and in *Saptadasa* (Seventeen) *stoma*

As a form of Soma sacrifice, animal sacrifice (*pasubandhu*) is an integral ritual of the Vajapeya Over and above the three victims of the *Sodasī* rite, the Vajapeya requires not only a fourth one, dedicated to Sarasvati, the goddess of speech and a fifth one for the Maruts, but also a set of seventeen victims for Prajapati, the god of creatures and procreation The one for the victorious Maruts must be a spotted sterile cow and those for Prajapati must be all hornless, all dark grey and all male animals Before their ceremonial slaughter the Hotr would recite the *Vamadevya Saman*, and after the offerings are made the omenta of the victims are to be taken

Then the ritual of the consecration of the sacrificer takes place which begins with a chariot race The chariot itself is conceived as Indra s thunderbolt which is seized by the pole and turned from left to right with *mantras* (*Vāj Sam* IX 5 ff) addressed to Aditi, the Great Mother Four horses are then anointed and yoked to the chariot Then wild rice is cooked and served in seventeen plates which the horses are made to smell The *Vājinām Saman* (*SV*, I 435) is sung which says The fiery steeds have gathered fiery mettle, the impulse of the god Savitr, win ye the heaven, O coursers'! (cf *Lat S S*, V 12 14) Seventeen drums are beaten Besides the sacrificer s chariot inside the *Vedī* sixteen others, each drawn by four horses, are got ready, outside the Vedī, for the race to the *Udumbara* branch as its goal and turning point The *Udumbara* branch which serves as the goal is planted at the end of the seventeenth arrow's range, shoot by the sacrificer northwards through the space between the *utkara* and *catvala* Then the sacrificer steps on the chariot with a hymn (*Vaj Sam* IX 13, cf *Taitt Sam* I 7 7 2) addressed to Savitṛ While the cars are on move the Adhvaryu utters verses from the *Rgveda* (IV 40 3-4, VII 38 7 8, X 64 4) and the *Vājasaneyi Samhitā* (IX. 15 18) After the cars have come back with the sacrificer keeping ahead of the others the victorious horse is again anointed

The race over, the priest takes the sacrificer to the Āhavanīya fire in which offering of clarified butter is made He utters twelve *Āpits*, formulas congratulating individuals (cf *Vaj Sam* IX 20),

or makes the sacrificer pronounce them The priest then utters six *Klptis*, formulas praising the sacrificial cult itself (cf *Vāj Sam* IX 21), or makes the sacrificer pronounce them

The eight cornered sacrificial post is then wrapt up or bound up in seventeen cloths There is a *wheaten* head piece Instead of the ordinary mortar shaped top piece, fixed on the post, here it is made of wheaten dough The post has a hollow at the top and it is not pointed at the end It is seventeen cubits long The priest then brings the sacrificer's wife, makes her wrap round herself a garment of *Kuśa* grass[10] and causes her to propitiate the sacrifice A ladder is fixed up on the post, and the sacrificer says 'Come, wife, ascend we the sky'. 'Ascend We,' also says the wife The sacrificer and his wife then ascend and touch the wheaten top piece According to the ritual of the Black Yajus,[11] the sacrificer, having ascended, lifts up *his arms to heaven, praying* '*we have gone to the light, to the gods*, we have become immortal, we have become Prajāpati's children' Men standing below then throw up to him seventeen small packets of salt made in *Asvattha* leaves, and he sprinkles the salt as homage paid to Mother Earth

The sacrificer descends on a piece of gold and steps upon a piece of skin spread out by the priest A throne, made of *Udumbara* wood, is placed for him in front of the *Havirdhāna* (cartshed) behind the *Āhavanīya* (fire) The priest placing him on the throne says 'This is thy kingship, thou art the ruler, the ruling lord, thou art firm and steadfast, thee for the tilling, thee for peaceful dwelling, thee for wealth, thee for thrift'

Seated on the throne the sacrificer offers seven *Vāja prasavanīya* oblations Seventeen kinds of food are brought in a vessel made of *Udumbara* wood by which the oblations are made Hymns from the *Vājasaneyi Samhitā* IX 23 29 are uttered in praise of Soma, Agni, Aryaman, Bṛhaspati, Indra, Visnu, Pusan, Aśvins, Savitṛ and Vak (Sarasvati) The sacrificer then is made to sit on a black antelope skin, with his face to the east and with a small gold and silver plate placed on either side of him Having got himself anointed in that position, he pronounces the formulas of the *Ujjiti* (victory) oblations and says 'With the (word of) one syllable Agni won the breath may I win that, with the (metre of) seventeen syllables Prajapati

10 In the ceremonial of the Black *Yajus* the sacrificer himself has to put on a *Urpya* garment. See *Taitt. Br*, 1 3 7 1

11 Sāyana on *Tait Sam*, I 7 9

won the seventeenfold *stoma* may I win that'

## 4. Keith on the Popular Character of the Vājapeya

The aforesaid rituals, to be performed by the kings, are presented in a very sophisticated way in the Brāhmana and the Sūtra texts But, as Keith[12] has rightly pointed out, "in sacerdotalizing the rite the priests have still retained its popular features (1) There is a race of seventeen chariots in which the sacrificer is victorious The purpose of this rite is doubtless, as stated by Oldenberg, *to secure the* sacrificer by magic the swiftness of the victorious steeds as strength (2) The sacrificer with his wife mounts on a chariot wheel, obviously a symbol of the sun, which is placed on the top of a long pole The joint action of the two is significant of the popular character of of the rite, and the act is again a magic device to secure the exaltation of the sacrificer (3) After his descent from the pole the sacrificer is anointed and proclaimed as victor The anointing is intended *to confer on him the power of oblation which is used for the anointing* (4) Before the descent the priests of the people touch him with bags of salt earth in *Asvattha* leaves or in *Asvattha* boxes, clearly as a means of securing fertility, showing that the offering is more than a mere piece of magic for the glorification of any individual person With this is in harmony the insistence of the *Śānkhyāyana* (XV 1 1) on the fact that the rite is available to any one who desires *annādya*, (i e , the eating of the food) and the name is explained as 'food and drink' Moreover, this accords with the Mantras used in touching the sacrificer, *annāya tvā* (i e , to you for the sake of food) etc and the rule in *Śānkhyāyana* (XVI 17 4) that the offering can be made for a Vaisya, to which may be added the *consecration of the* sacrificer for *Kṛṣī* in the *Vājasaneyī* (IX 22) and possibly the connection of the Maruts, the 'people among the gods', with the rite" Accepting these views as dependable working hypotheses we shall now turn our attention to the particulars of the aforesaid rituals and the range of their suggestivity

## 5. The Ritual of Collective Drinking

Drinking had always been an essential feature of the Vedic

12 *Veda of the Black Yajus School*, HOS, 1914 pp CX CXI

sacrifices and hence it must have a great ritual significance, the nature of which we are expected to discover The common form of wine used by the Vedic people was called *Soma* which occupied a very important place in Vedic literature, being considered as the means through which men could overcome death and attain immortality [13] Soma was also a Vedic god and the important rituals centering round this god (*Somayāga* s) are quite well known Two other kinds of wine, *Surā* and *Parisrut*, were also known to the Vedic peoples and these two kinds were used especially in the Vājapeya sacrifice

In later Tantric tradition the use of wine is also well known Wine is one of the five *Pañcamakaras* of the Tantric cults What, therefore, does the ritual use of wine really mean? Scholars who have tried to rationalise or justify Tantra have resorted on the one hand to the mystic interpretations of such rituals, and on the other, tried their best to find out a suitable Vedic basis for them But this approach goes against all canons of historical enquiry On the basis of some valuable data, we have, however, come to the conclusion that ritual use of wine is a very primitive practice, originally connected with fertility magic, and that this old practice under different historical conditions made its way into the patriarchal Vedic tradition and also in the matriarchal Tantric tradition Interestingly enough, this argument finds support in Keith's interpretation of the Vājapeya in which he says that wine in the said function was clearly related to 'the ceremonial rituals in connexion with fertility magic' [14]

William Crooke[15] has shown that the idea that liquor is the vehicle of magical power lies at the root of the tribal rituals all over India He has cited numerous examples of the ritual use of liquor for the purpose of ensuring the fertility of the fields As for example, the Oraons before transplanting of the rice seedlings make a libation of wine on the ground, the Baigas before cultivation scatter a line of wine along the boundary of the cultivable land It is due to the fact that in primitive thought wine was regarded as a life giving principle Chattopadhyaya[16] has furnished two sets of examples to show that (1) liquor is resorted to for the purpose of overcoming death and that (2) the use of liquor is designed to ensure birth That wine

13 Cf *RV* IV 48 3
14 *Religion and Philosophy of the Veda* p 91
15 *Religion and Folklore of Northern India* Oxford 1926 pp 100 ff
16 *Lokāyata*, Delhi 1968 pp 309 ff

overcomes the contamination of death (cf the Rgvedic passage We have drunk the Soma and have become immortal) is evidenced from the funeral rites among backward people in different parts of the world ' The Irish wake is a familiar example of the practice of drinking to celebrate death In West Africa the Tshi people drink heavily during the fast which follows a death The same is the case among the Yorubas At funerals among the Woolwa Indians there is much drinking of *mishla* As soon as a Bangala man dies the family gets in large supplies of sugarcane wine The Guina Indians drink and dance at the funeral feast Among the Tshinyai of the Zambesi the native beer, *pombe* plays a considerable part in post funeral rites '[17] Similar use of wine in the funeral rite is not at all uncommon in India One of the commonest name for locally made wine in India is *mrtasanjivani*, that which restores life[18] The same belief probably explains the use of wine in the puberty rites the essence of which is death and rebirth[19] Wine plays an important part in the marriage rituals all over the world as an agent of procreation[20] One of the best known examples of the belief in wine inducing the reproductive urge in the human being is retained in the creation legend of the Santals[21] So in primitive thought wine is the agent that helps man not only to overcome death but also to create new life and it is here that the ritual use of wine for enhancing fertility of the earth is to be sought

## 6 The Chariot Race

As regards other rites peculiar to the Vajapeya, the most interesting is the chariot race in which the sacrificer is made victorious Professor Hillebrandt claims for this feature of the sacrifice the character of a relic of an old national festival, a kind of Indian Olympic games[22] Oldenberg says that the purpose of this rite is to secure the sacrificer by magic the swiftness of the victorious steeds as strength, and Keith accepts this interpretation without any modification[23]

17 *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* V pp 79-80 See ch VIII pp 153-54
18 Chattopadhyaya *op cit* p 310
19 See my *Indian Puberty Rites* Calcutta 1968 pp 5 ff.
20 *ERE* V p 80
21 *JASB* (SC) XIX, pp 12 14 Chattopadhyaya *op cit* pp 310 11
22 Eggeling *op cit* p XXIV
23 *Veda of the Black Yajus School* p. CX.

But this rite can not be dissociated from the previous rite of collective *drinking as regards the question of purpose* It is also a clear fertility rite Sir James George Frazer has drawn our attention to the tradition that the great games of Greece originated in funeral celebrations and that the tradition is confirmed by the Greek practice Thus in the Homeric age funeral games including chariot-races, foot races, wrestling, boxing, spear-throwing, quoit throwing and archery were celebrated in honour of the dead heroes at their barrows [24] Frazer gives plenty of examples to show that these funeral games were supposed to ensure plenty of corn, fruit, milk and fish [25] As is known to all, funeral rites and fertility rites are closely linked up all over the world The death and revival of plant life have not only given us a good number of primitive myths but also have contributed to the growth of the ideas of resurrection and rebirth and given rise to numerous cults and rituals The primitive female figurines in many cases are grim embodiments of the Mother or Earth Goddess who is also the guardian of the dead—'an underworld deity connected alike with the corpse and the seed-corn buried beneath the earth' [26] One should not fail to recall in this connection that *a cult of Mother Goddess* is conspicuously present in the section dealing with the ritual of the Chariot race [27]

Later on, however, the original purpose of the Chariot race became somewhat changed, and like the Aksa of the Rajasūya, it came to be used as a means of the distribution of wealth In the Vājapeya, the king's participation in the chariot race is a symbolic miming of this old custom That the chariot race had something to do with the ancient system of distribution is evident from the Vājapeya legend which says "*The gods went on making offerings unto one another Prajāpati gave himself up to them then the sacrifice became theirs, and indeed the sacrifice is the food of the gods They then spake, 'To which of us shall this belong?' They did not agree together, saying, 'To me, To me', 'Not being agreed', they said, 'Let us run a race for it Whichever of us shall win, to him it shall belong,'—'So be it,' So they ran a race for it*" [28]

24 *Iliad*, XXIII 255 ff, 629 ff, 657 ff
25 *The Golden Bough*, Part III, 1966 edition, pp 92 105 See ch VIII pp 152 55
26 Cf Piggott, *Prehistoric India*, p 127
27 *Śat Br*, V 1 4 4
28 *Ib*, V 1 1 2 3

## 7. Food and Drink

According to Eggeling Vājapeya means 'drink of strength' or the 'race cup', but he has overlooked the most simple meaning which is *Food and Drink*[29] In fact every line of the *Śatapatha Brāhmana* clearly suggests that originally the Vājapeya was a simple magical performance employed as a productive technique to obtain food and drink Here we are quoting a number of passages from the said *Brāhmana* in order to substantiate our assumption

"Thereupon he seizes a spotted sterile cow for the victorious Maruts, for the spotted sterile cow is thus (earth) Whatever food, rooted or rootless, is here established on her, thereby she is a spotted cow Now, he who offers the Vājapeya wins food, for Vaja peya doubtless means the same as *anna peya* (food and drink), and the Maruts are the *peasants*, and the *peasants* are *food* (for the nobles) "[30]

"He now takes out material for *wild rice* of seventeen plates for Brhaspati, for he who offers the Vājapeya wins food,—Vāja-peya being doubtless the same as *anna peya* thus whatever *food* he has thereby won, that he now prepares for him" [31]

"He then steps over against (the horses) with the Bārhaspatya pap, and touches it, for he who offers Vājapeya wins *food* since Vāja-peya is the same as *anna peya* whatever Food he has thus gained that he now, having reached the goal, brings in contact with himself, puts within himself "[32]

"And as to why he touches the *wheat* wheat is food, and he who offers the Vājapeya, wins food, for Vāja peya is the same as *anna peya* thus whatever food he has thereby won, therewith now that he has gone to that supreme goal, he puts himself in contact and possesses himself of it,—therefore he touches the wheat (top piece) "[33]

' They throw up to him bags of salt, for *salt means cattle, and cattle is food*, and he who offers the Vājapeya wins food, for Vāja peya is same as *anna peya* thus whatever food he thereby has gained, there with now that he has gone to the supreme goal, he puts himself in contact, and makes it his own—therefore they throw bags of salt

29 Kane, *op cit*, p 1206
30 *Śat Br*, V 1 3 3
31 *ib*, V 1 4 12
32 *ib*, V 1 5. 25.
33 *ib*, V 2 1 13

up to him "[34]

"He now proceeds with the Bārhaspatya pap Its *Svistakrt* remains yet unoffered when he (the Adhvaryu) brings him (the Sacrificer) some food, for he who offors the Vājapeya wins food, *Vāja peya* being the same as *anna peya* thus whatever food he (the Sacrificer) has thereby gained, that he (the Adhvaryu) now brings to him "[35]

"May the Lord of Speech render our meat palatable, hail For the Lord of Speech is Prajāpati, and meat means food May Prajāpati this day make palatable thus our food "[36]

"That chariot, seized by the pole, he turns (from left to right) so as to make it stand inside the *Vedi*, with, 'in the winning of wealth, the *Great Mother*'—Wealth means food in the winning of *food*, the *Great Mother* "[37]

"O Divine waters, what rushing, high peaked, wealth winning wave ye have, therewith may this one win wealth, *Wealth is food* he thus says, May he thereby gain food"[38]

"With that strength be thou strong and wealth winning for us, O Courser, and victorious at the gathering Wealth means food he thus means to say, '*And be thou a food-winner for us at this our sacrifice*, at the gathering of the gods win thou this sacrifice, Prajāpati "[39]

"May gain of wealth come to me, Wealth means food, he thus says May gain of food come to me May these two, Heaven and Earth, the all shaped, come to me, for Prajāpati is Heaven and Earth "[40]

## 8. The Sāmans

The above citations sufficiently reveal the original purpose of the Vajāpeya That the Vajāpeya primarily stood for a magical performance as a technique of food production is also proved by the *Sāmans* associated with it The word *Sāman* is generally interpreted as 'melody', although not in the modern sense of the term To quote Winternitz[41] "The priests and theologians certainly did not invent

34 *ib*, V 2 1 16
35 *ib*, V 2 2 1
36 *ib*, V 1 1 16
37 *ib*, V 1 4 4
38 *ib*, V 1 4 6
39 *ib*, V 1 4 10
40 *ib*, V 1 4 26
41 *op cit*, I, pp 167 168, italics added.

all these melodies themselves The oldest of them were presumably *popular melodies to which in very early times semi religious songs* were sung at solstice celebrations and other national festivals, and yet others may date back as far as that noisy music with which pre-brahmanical wizard priests—not unlike the magicians, shamans and medicine men of the primitive peoples—accompanied their *wild songs and rites* Traces of this popular origin of the *Sāman*-melodies are seen already in the above mentioned *stobhas* or shouts of joy, and specially in the fact that the melodies of the *Sāmaveda* were looked upon as *possessing magic powers* even as late as in the brahmanical times There is a ritual book belonging to the *Sāmaveda,* called *Sāmavidhāna Brahmana,* the second part of which *is a regular handbook of magic, in which the employment of various Sāmans for various purposes is taught* "

The *Sāmans* are therefore primitive songs intended to achieve some definite purpose "The common speech of the savages," writes Thomson,[42] ' has a strongly marked rhythm and a lilting melodic accent In some languages the accent is so musical, and so vital to the meaning, that when a song is composed the tune is largely dictated by the natural melody of the spoken words And if their common speech is poetical, their poetry is magical The only poetry they know is song, and their singing is nearly always accompanied by some bodily action, designed to effect some change in the external world—to impose *illusion* on *reality*" Winternitz[43] points out that one of the main characteristics of the *Sāmans* is that when these are chanted the priests have to make some bodily actions Moreover, the *Sāmans* are of two kinds—*Grāmageya* (to be sung in the villages) and *Aranyageya* (to be sung in the forests) The purpose of chanting them outside the locality was certainly magical Otherwise there was no need of chanting them in the forests

Sri B P Mishra in an informative article[44] has shown that each of the *Sāmans* of the *Pañcavimśa Brāhmana* was employed for a material purpose Many of these *Sāmans* also occur in other texts including the *Śatapatha Brāhmana* and in connection with the Vājapeya, we have referred to some of them The *Pañcavimśa Brahmana,*[45] which

42 *Studies in Ancient Greek Society* I pp 439-40
43 *Loc cit*
44 *Religious Life in Ancient India* (ed D C Sircar) Calcutta 1971
45 XVIII 6

insists specially on the symbolic identity of Prajāpati and the Vājapeya, states that the latter consists of seventeen *stotras* and has for its characteristic mode of chanting the *Saptadaśa stoma* or seventeen-versed hymn For example, the *Bahiṣpavamāna stotra*, which in the ordinary *Agniṣṭoma* is chanted in nine verses is at the Vājapeya made to consist of seventeen verses Again, the *Mādhyandina-pavamāna*, ordinarily chanted in fifteen verses, here consists of seventeen Likewise, the *Ārbhava pavamāna* has been made so The *Vājapeya-sāman*, otherwise called *Bṛhat stotra*, also consists of seventeen verses

However, the most important of all these is the *Vāmadevya saman* One should not fail to recall in this connection that this particular *Sāman* is specially described in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*[46] as a sexual rite identified with the *Yajña* itself Every part of this *Sāman*—*Hinkāra, Prastāva, Udgītha, Pratihāra, Nidhāna*—is identified in this Upanisad with different modes of sexual intercourse In the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*[47] these sex rites are elaborated and it is clearly stated that by performing sexual intercourse one acquires the merit of the *Vājapeya* sacrifice The part played by sexual acts in agricultural rites is well known to all[48] The *Vāmadevya Sāman*[49] is chanted during the Vājapeya celebration in connection with the offerings of animal victims to Prajāpati The passage of the *Śatapatha Brāhmana*,[50] which refers to the chanting of the *Vamadevya*, undoubtedly presupposes the sexual rites of the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* It frankly states that *Vāmadevya* means *productivity*

## 9. Yajña As the Productive Technique

In view of what we have stated above we are now in a position to assert that the Vājapeya was originally an agricultural magic performed exclusively for the purpose of food and drink "Indeed the sacrifice is the food of the gods",[51] for Prajāpati told the gods "The sacrifice (shall be) your food, immortality your sustenance (*urj*) and the sun of your light"[52] The relation between the Vāja

46 II 13 See Ch I, Sec 7
47 VI 4, etc
48 See Ch I, Sec. 7, 9
49 *SV* II 32-34
50 V 1 3 12
51 *Śat Br*, V 1 1 2
52 *ib*, II 4 2 1

peya and agriculture is clearly demonstrated in the Vājapeya hymn offered to the Maruts in which it is stated beyond all doubt that the Maruts are *peasants* and the peasants are food [53] Equally significant is the ritual of the cooking of wild rice[54] which refers to the *collectional stage* of social evolution and thus pushes back the origin of the Vājapeya to a remote antiquity

That the Vedic *Yajnas* were originally inseparable aspects of the primitive productive technique has been admitted even by the Vedic tradition itself The *Aitareya Brāhmana*[55] says that once the *Yajña* went away from the gods At this the gods became very anxious and made desperate attempts to bring it back because the loss of yajña meant a threat to the means of subsistence of the gods This is proved by the following passage of the same text[56] ' The *Yajña* went away from the gods (saying) 'I shall not be your food 'No' replied the gods, 'Verily thou shalt be our food' The gods crushed it, it being taken apart was not sufficient for them The gods said, 'It will not be sufficient for us, being taken apart, come, let us gather together the yajña (They replied) 'Be it so' They gathered it together having gathered it together they said to the Asvins, 'Do ye two heal it' "

The gods crushed the *yajña* by violence on its refusal to serve them They reduced it into shattered pieces to utilise its parts individually, but this attempt proved futile Hence they called the divine physicians, the Aśvins, to revive the shattered pieces once again in the original undivided form Although in the said myth forced after-thoughts were added by the priests, its significance is clear enough to assure us at least of two points that the *yajña* was originally connected with the mode of obtaining food and that it was of collective service, not to be appropriated by individuals in parts and portions

Other passages of the *Aitareya Brāhmana* also show that the *yajña* had originally been a vital aid to food production ' The *Yajña*, as food departed from the gods, the gods said 'The *Yajña* as food hath left us, this *yajña* food let us sarch for They said, "How shall we search? 'By the *brahman* and the metres (*Chandas*), they said They consecrated the Brāhmana with the metres, for him they performed the *yajña* up to the end they also performed the joint

53 *ib*, V 1 3 3
54 *ib*, V 1 4 12 14
55 III 9
56 I 18 Keith *Religion and Philosophy of the Veda*, p 121

offerings to the wives (of the gods) Therefore now also in the consecration offering they perform the *yajña* right up to the end, they also perform the joint offerings to the wives They performed the guest reception, to him with the guest reception they came nearer, they hastened with the performance They made it end in the sacrificial food Therefore now also the guest reception ends in *ida* Having obtained him (*yajña*) they (the gods) said, 'Serve us for food' 'No', he replied, how can I serve you? 'Then he only looked at To him they said, 'with the *brahman* and the metres becoming united do thou serve us as food' 'Be it so' (he replied) Therefore now also the *yajna* becoming united with the *brahman* and the metres bear the *yajña* to the gods"[57]

## 10. Yajna and Magic: The Collective Approach

The passage of the *Aitareya Brāhmana*, quoted above, shows that the gods, evidently the remote ancestors of the Vedic peoples, revived sacrifice by *brahman* and *chandas* The latter denotes metre or rhythm, but the significance of the former is misled by various interpretations In the Upanisads, *brahman* is a term for the Ab solute Elsewhere *brahman* is the name of a god who is equated with Prajapati In the early Vedic texts *brahman* signifies a class of priests and also holy power, and as such it has a direct biaring on the term brāhmana But *brahman* is also a term for food and also for wealth in the *Rgveda* The etymology of the name Brahmanaspati, as suggested by Sayana,[58] is striking *Brahmanah annasya parivrdhasya karmanah vāpate pālayati*, one that nourishes the activity of food production According to the *Nighantu*[59] the word *brahman* is synonymous for *anna* (food) and wealth Commenting upon the said interpretation Yāska has foreshadowed the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* passages like *Jātāni Annena Vardhante*, etc[60] Hence there is no doubt that, despite later *interpretations, the word brahman originally stood for* *anna* or food, which is recorded in the Vedic tradition itself Likewise the word Brāhmana, as is now evident, originally denoted the primitive magicians whose ritual assistance was required for pro ducing and procuring *brahman* According to Sāyana the word

57 III 45, Keith, *op cit*, pp 193 94
58 On *RV* II 23 1
59 II 7, II 10
60 II 2

*brahman* also stood for *stotra* or hymns, and this is also significant for our purpose

The *Yajna* was restored also by *Chandas* While dealing with the *Sāmans* we have seen that rhythm and metre, song and melody, were imagined as having magical efficacy in obtaining food According to the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*,[61] in the beginning the world was covered over with death and hunger and these were overcome only by speech—the hymns (*ṛk*), the formulas (*yajus*), the chants (*sāman*), the metres (*chandas*) and the rituals (*yajna*) In many passages of the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*[62] songs are clearly associated with food production. It is also said that the gods, being afraid of death, evidently from hunger, took shelter under the *Chandas* or metres.[63] The importance attached to various metres like *gayatrī, anuṣṭubh, bṛhatī, triṣṭubh, jāgatī, virāj*, etc. in the Vedic literature is not therefore without any significance. That they were evidently meant to fulfil the desire of food has been shown by Chattopadhyaya[64] who has cited a number of significant verses from the *Ṛgveda* 'Then take they seat with us amidst the *gaṇa* and *sing that we may obtain food*—we who are singing (VI 40 1) "(O Agni) thou *with these songs bring the wealth attended with food*, we shall serve thee with our service (II 6 1)" 'That Indra inspired and fulfilled the *desires of the Angirasas expressed in songs for food* (II 20 5)" 'Through Yajna the seer with desire got the cows with *songs* from the giver of water (II 21 5)" 'The Agni Vaisvānara, being realised as such in mind, we invoke *with songs* in the yajna, being desirous of food and wealth (III 26 1)" "The *havih* offering placed on the *Kuśa*-grass and the *songs* make thee (the Asvins) come to us with food in accordance with our wish (I 117 1)" "O Maruts, this panegyric is for thee this *song* came to us who respect thee and melt thee (to charity) that *we may know the food*, as the spoils of victory, and meant for the (nourishment of the) body (I 165 15, I 166 15, I 167. 11, I 168 10)"

One point which we must not overlook as regards the aforesaid verses is the collective approach In every case we have *we* and *us* and not *I* or *me* In *RV* VI 40 1 quoted above, Indra is invoked to take his seat amidst the *gaṇa* and participate in the

61 I 2. 1-5.
62. I 3. 7, I 13. 4, II 8. 3, etc.
63 I. 4. 2.
64. *Lokayata*, pp. 108 ff.

*singing ritual* for the purpose of obtaining food Since *gana* means tribe, the question of collective approach to material desires rises automatically Those who sang the songs for food belonged to a stage of society at which the community was still an undivided whole It was the proper environment for magic which rested entirely on collective psychology Jane Harrison[65] observes "One element in the rite we have already observed, and that is, that it must be done collectively, by a number of persons feeling the same emotion Collectivity and emotional tension, two elements that tend to turn the simple reaction into a rite, are—especially among primitive peoples—closely associated, indeed scarcely separable The individual among savages has but a thin and meagre personality, high emotional tension is to him only caused and maintained by a thing felt socially, it is what the tribe feels that is sacred, that is matter for ritual Intensity then and collectivity go together "

Traces of this collectivity are found in the *Sattras* The *Atharva veda*[66] appears to regard the *Sattras* as *utsanna* (gone out of vogue) and this shows that these rituals were very ancient The *Sattras* were sacrificial sessions the duration of which varied from twelve days to a year or more The *Sattras* were to be performed by many sacrificers (*Katyāyana S S*, I 6 14, *Jaimini* VI 6 16 23) There were no separate priests but the Yajamanas themselves were the priests (*Jaimini* X 6 45 59) A text quoted by Sabara on *Jaimini* VI 2 1 says that the persons who engaged together in a *Sattra* must be at least 17 and no more than 24, and each of the performers secured the same regard for which the *Sattra* was performed There was no choosing of priests and no question of their remuneration (*Jaimini* X, 2 34 38)[67] One of the most interesting days of this collective ritual in which all were Yajamānas was the *Mahavrata* which was the last day but one, in a *Sattra* One should not fail to recall in this connection that *Mahavrata* clearly means *anna* or food[68] In this besides the offering of a *mahavratīya* cup of Soma in addition to the usual ones to Prajapati, a harlot (?) and a brahmacarin abused (?) each other on the northern hip of the altar and *sexual intercourse between a man and a woman* took place in a

65 *Ancient Art and Ritual* London 1935 pp 36 37
66 XI 7 7 8
67 Kane *op cit* II pp 1241-42
68 *Tāndya Br* IV 10 2 *Śat Br*, IV 6 4 2

screened shed to the south of the *mārjālīya* shed[69] Drums were beaten and songs were sung in which the wives of the performers and maidens also took active part Girls, placing water jars on their heads, danced thrice with the *mārjālīya* seat, striking the ground with their right feet and singing popular songs[70]

Although from the later texts it is very difficult, rather impossible, to reconstruct the original *Sattra* rituals, which were so primitive that even in the days of the *Atharvaveda* they were regarded as things of hoary antiquity, the features which we have chalked from the later texts give us some idea of a primitive fertility rite in a primitive set up There was no single yajamāna like a king or a wealthy person for whose welfare the sacrifice was to be performed There were no priests who would perform the acts against sacrificial fees The *Sattra* rituals were thus basically collective in which all were Yajamanas and priests at the same time The *Mahāvrata* was the ritual of food production in which natural fertility was viewed, as happened in the case of many primitive tribes all over the world,[71] in terms of human fertility, as the primitive peoples wanted to increase the generative powers of nature by sexual acts or their mimings[72]

## 11. Metamorphosis of the Yajamāna

Now we are in a position to trace the process through which the primitive rites of food production like the Vajapeya were gradually transformed into the mechanical secerdotalism of the priestly class designed exclusively for the interest of the king or the ambitious individuals We have seen that there was a plurality of the Yajamanas in the *Sattras* According to Monier Williams[73] a Yajamāna denoted "the person paying the cost of a sacrifice, the institutor of sacrifice (who, to perform it, employs a priest or priests, who are often hereditary functionaries in a family), any patron, host, rich man, head of a family or tribe' Evidently this is true so

69 *Kāt S S*, XIII 3 9

70 *Jaimini* X 4 8, *Āpastamba* S S XXI 17 15 16. XXI 19 17 20 XXI 20 *Aitareya Āraṇyaka*, V 1 5

71 J G Frazer *The Golden Bough* (ab) pp. 136 ff, R. Briffault, *The Mothers* London 1952, III, pp. 3 ff., 197 ff.

72 N N Bhattacharyya, *Indian Mother Goddess*, Calcutta 1970 Chs. II III

73 *Sanskrit English Dictionary*, p. 839, Cf. Bloomfield in *JAOS* XIX, p 13, Keith, *Religion and Philosophy of the Veda*, p. 289

far the later *Yajñas* in their sophisticated forms are concerned But the etymology of the word yajamāna goes against such an impression The word is derived from the root *yaj* to which the suffix *śānac* is added According to Panini,[74] when the person derives the benefit of an action performed by himself, the suffix *śānac* is added to the root Therefore etymologically *yajamāna* means, 'he who performs the sacrificial act for his own interest' In later age, the Yajamāna was still the enjoyer of the fruit of sacrifice, but instead of performing it himself he got it done by the priests, and for this he had to pay a huge sum of money to them

Chattopadhyaya[75] shows that in fact there are many indications in the *Rgveda* to confirm the etymological evidence that originally the Yajamānas themselves were the performers of the sacrificial acts in which the formidable array of priests was not required Numerous examples from the *Rgveda*[76] can be cited to show that the important functions of the sacrifice were performed by the Yajamānas themselves without any aid of the priestly class In a verse it is stated that on the banks of Asikni the Yajamāna is, as it were, the Hotā[77] Moreover, in an overwhelmingly large number of passages a pronounced collective bias is attributed to the functions of the Yajamānas, and we have not only the mention of a collective body of Yajamānas but also of their identity with the common tribesmen "We, the Yajamānas, with favourable *mantras* (spells) invoke you (Agni) One who fulfils the desire of the people (*Visah*) "[78] "O Agni, the Yajamānas daily hold towards you all the best wealth—along with you, desiring wealth, the intelligent people opened wide the stall full of cows "[79] "The gods and the Yajamanas, the protector of the wind ask for the goddess *Śraddhā*, calling her with intense longing they gain wealth through Sraddhā "[80] "Sarasvati, whom the fathers invoked and who, coming from the south, pervades the *Yajña*—may she give to the Yajamānas the shares (*bhāgam*) of the food, fostering wealth a thousand fold '[81]

74 I 3 72
75 *Lokāyata*, pp 606 ff
76 I 24 11, I 51 8, I 81 2, I 83 3, I 92 3, I 138 4, etc
77 *RV* IV 17 15
78 I 127 2
79 X 45 11
80 X 151 4
81 X. 17 9

"O Agni, the possessor of food, the expert sons of Vasistha invoked you in the assemblies (*Vidathesu*) with praises, do give us, the Yajamānas, increasing wealth and protect us always with well-wishes"[82]

Since it took a long period of time for the composition of the *Rgveda*, it is not difficult to find out passages indicating the functional differences between the Yajamānas and the priests. But originally there was no such difference as we have seen in connection with the *Sattras*. Keith[83] quotes the view of Oldenberg to show that the *Sattras* contain relics of primitive collective endeavour. Ganganath Jha[84] found it necessary to use the term 'communistic sacrifice' to denote the *Sattras*. Even the etymological meaning of the word *Yajurveda* is significant in this respect. '(They) performed the Yajña in the hoary past, *Yaj lit us*'. Thus, along with a reference to the past, there was, in the use of the plural, also a reference to the ancient collective functioning.[85]

In later times, with the emergence of class division, this collectivity was lost. The Yajamānas were no longer a collective entity, but wealthy individuals, usually Ksatriya chiefs, and the task of performing the *Yajñas* rested essentially on the professional priests. In a passage of the *Aitareya Brāhmana*[86] it is stated that the *Yajña* deserted the gods and it was pursued by the Brāhmanas and the Ksatriyas. The Ksatriyas, symbolising the lordly power, could not get hold of it by their weapons. But the Brāhmanas could, because, being blocked by them, the *yajña* recognised its own weapons of holy power in them. Hence it agreed to return to the Brāhmanas, and also to the Ksatriyas, provided that they would resort to the holy power of the Brāhmanas. "From them the *Yajña* departed, it the holy power and the lordly power pursued the holy power pursued with the weapons of the holy power, the lordly power with those of the lordly power. The weapons of the holy power are the weapons of the *Yajña*, the weapons of the lordly power are the horse chariot, the corslet, the bow and arrow. The lordly power returned without attaining it, from its weapons it turned away trembling. The holy power followed it and obtained

82. X. 122. 8
83. *Religion and Philosophy of the Veda* p. 290
84. *Pūrvamīmāṁsā and its Sources* Benaras 1942 p. 318 f.
85. Chattopadhyaya *op. cit.*, p. 614
86. VII 19

it, having obtained it, it kept blocking it from above, it being obtained and blocked from above standing, recognising its own weapons, went up to the holy power Therefore even now the *Yajña* finds support in the holy power and in the Brāhmana The lordly power then followed it, it said, 'Do thou call upon me in this *Yajna*' 'Be it so', it replied, 'lay aside thine own weapons, and with the weapons of the holy power, the form of the holy power, becoming the holy power, do thou come to the *Yajña*'' [87]

## 12. Conclusion

This is how, with the growth of class society, the *Yajña* could be protected and performed by the priestly and royal classes What was *Vājapeya*, technique of obtaining the means of subsistence, the collective magic rituals to ensure the primitive labour process of food production, in the pre class society, was later transformed into a royal or aristocratic function Now it is to be performed by a Brāhmana or a Ksatriya desirous of the position of 'a super eminently learned or prosperous man' Now the king is believed to have gained identity with Prajāpati, the lord of creatures The primitive equality was no more This is reflected in a legend found in the *Jaiminiya Brāhmana*,[88] according to which, formerly king Varuna was the equal of other gods, but desirous of becoming the lord of the gods he resorted to Prajapati and eventually became the king of the gods Special features of the Vājapeya, in its sophisticated form, especially insist upon the king's identity with Prajapati "When the race starts the *brahman* priest ascends on to an Udumbara Chariot Wheel (which is revolved from left to right) pronouncing formulas in which he expresses his intention to win *vāja* and to ascend into the highest firmament of Indra Udumbara wood (ficus glomerata) represents food and procreation, Prajāpati the nobility (Cf *Ait Br*, V 24, VII 32, VIII 8) the wheel, the sun and universal dominion the king is to become a *Cakravartin* By pronouncing in this way, these formulas, he wins the atmosphere This race, like the cow raid and a dice play in other inauguration ceremonies, represents a test for the ruler's superiority in valour and physical prowess, and a means of enabling him to prove himself the fittest man for kingship,

87 Keith, *op cit*, pp 309-10

88 III 152, J Gonda, *Ancient Indian Kingship from the Religious Point of View*, Leiden 1966, pp 86-87

as well as magical devices to achieve the defeat of his adversaries in prowess, segacity, etc"[69]

The above quote is from Gonda who is one of the recent authorities on the Vedic sacrifices Like the earlier authorities—Oldenberg, Keith and others—he has also insisted upon the magical element of the sacrifices But what he has clearly ignored is the social basis of such magical elements, characteristic of all the *Yajñas*, their reality and illusion in pre-class and class societies respectively The three grand sacrifices of the Vedic texts—the Asvamedha, the Rājasūya and the Vajapeya—reveal how the real techniques of *Yajña* were replaced by illusory techniques, how they, being divorced from the primitive social reality, ultimately culminated into meaninglessness and gross absurdity, according to the logic of the pure illusion itself

69 *Ibid*, pp 84-85

# IV

# THE TWICE-BORN

## A Study in the Rituals of Tribal Initiation

### 1. Prologue: Birth and Rebirth

"From the cradle to the grave", writes E O James, "human existence has seemed to be in a state of flux, 'never continuing in one stay', a dying to be born again, exemplified in the decay and regeneration in nature This has called forth a series of *rites de passage* at the critical junctions to obtain a fresh outpouring of life and power " Among the primitive tribes the members of a community are found graded, according to age, as children, adults and elders, the transition from one grade to another being effected by the rites of initiation, the most important of which is that at puberty which is nothing but an introduction to full tribal status and a pre condition of marriage or sex life The qualification for admission in the adult group is not birth, but rebirth (cf the Sanskrit term *dvija* or twice-born), restricted only to those who have undergone the appropriate rites and customs

The significance of the puberty rites is therefore expressed in primitive thought by the idea that at initiation the individual dies and is born again Kartsen writes "When a child is born, the life thus brought into being is not a new life It is simply one of the forefathers that reappears in the new-born "[1] Frazer says that the new born is conceived as a re incarnation of clan totem That is why, all over the world, it is or has been the custom to name the child after one of its predecessors [2] Just as the ancestor is born again as an infant, so at puberty the child dies and is born again as a man or a woman, and the occasion is marked by giving him or her a new name The rebirth of the initiate is often represented dramatically by a magical representation of the act of dying and

1 R Kartsen, *The Civilization of South American Indians* London 1926 p 416
2 *Totemism and Exogamy*, London 1910 II p 302 453, III, p. 298

'golden womb', and the performer of the *mahādāna* had to sit with his head between his knees and holding his breath for some time Then he was taken out of the womb and his *Jatakarman* and other ceremonies were celebrated as if he was a newly born child He was then regarded as having assumed *divya deha* (celestial body), as a result of his re birth from the 'golden womb', after having discarded his *martya deha* (earthly body) which he was carrying after his birth from his mother's womb[4]

With these few words, we shall now turn our attention to a brief description of some of the leading features of the *Upanayana* ceremony

## 2 The Ritual of Upanayana

The auspicious time for the *Upanayana* is autumn, spring or summer, the fruitful seasons of the year It should be performed in the bright half of the month A Brahmacari has to wear two garments, *vasas* and *uttarīya* The upper garment (*uttarīya*) for a Brāhmana should be the skin of a black deer, for a Ksatriya that or a *ruru* deer and for a Vaiśya that of a cow or goat The initiated one must keep a *danda* or a staff which should be made of the *palāśa* or *bilva* wood in the case of a Brāhmana of the *nyagrodha* or *asvattha* or *rauhitaka* or *vaṭa* or *khadira* wood in the case of a Ksatriya and of the *badara* or *udumbara* or *nyagrodha* or *pilu* wood in the case of a Vaisya The length of the staff should be as high as the head in the case of the Brahmanas, forehead in the case of the Ksatriyas and tip of nose in the case of the Vaisyas

A girdle made of *muñja* grass should be tied round a Brahamana boy's waist one made of *murva* grass for a Kṣatriya and one of hemp for a Vaiśya The girdle is called *mekhalā* Some of the Gṛhyasutras like *Asvalāyana*, *Āpastamba*, etc do not say any word about the sacred thread while others say that the boy already wears the *yajñopavīta* before the *homa* begins It seems that threads of cotton were not invariable in the days of the Gṛhyasutras The student may take a *yajñopavīta*, a cord of threads, a garment or a rope of *kusa* grass Manu says that the *upavīta* of a Brahmana should be made of cotton and it should have three threads Generally the *Yajñopavīta* has three threads of nine strands The *yajñopavīta* for Brahmanas, Ksatriyas and Vaisyas should respectively be of

4 D C Sircar *Successors of the Sātavāhanas* pp 50 ff

cotton, hemp and sheep wool

Sometimes a feast is given to the Brāhmanas before the ceremony begins The boy also has to take food He has to tread on a stone to the north of the fire with his right foot after *homa* He has also to taste curds thrice after repeating the verse *dadhikrāvno akārisam* On the fourth day after *Upanayana*, a rite is performed called *medhāyajña* by virtue of which it is supposed that the student's intellect is made capable of mastering the *Vedas* The student has to water the root of a *palāsa* tree or anoint it with *ājya* (clarified butter) The fire kindled at the time of *Upanayana* is to be kept up for three days The student is required to offer every day after *Upanayana* a *samidh* into the fire in the morning and in the evening After giving the student the staff the teacher gives him a bowl for collecting alms The student should first beg of a man or a woman who will not refuse He should then beg of three women or of six or of twelve Manu says that he should first beg of his mother, sister or mother's sister Food obtained by begging is supposed to be pure The initiated one has to perform *sandhyā* or daily prayer at least twice The principal features of the prayer called *sandhyā* are *ācamana* (sipping water), *prānāyāma* (restraint of breath) *mārjana* (sprinkling water by means of *kusa* grass), *arghya* (offering water out of respect to the sun) *upasthāna* (worship of Mitra and Varuna) and recitation of *Gāyatrī* hymn[5]

### 3. The Problem of its Original Contents

The ritual of *Upanayana* as found in the Grhya and Dharma sūtras reveals a sophisticated stage of development, the essential features of which consist of the formal acceptance of the pupil by the teacher, the entrusting of the pupil to the care of certain gods, the duties to be discharged by the pupil like putting fuel on the fire, begging alms, etc , the garments to be used by the pupil and so on The earlier ritualistic texts like the Brahmanas also bear similar contents (cf *Śat Br* XI 3 3), although here and there, like the

5 *Āpastamba Gr Sū* I 1, X. 5, X. 9, XI 15-16, XI 22, *Āpastamba Dh. Sū* I 1, *Āsvalāyana Gr Sū.*, I 19 22, III 6, *Hiranyakesin Gr Sū* I 1, I 2, *Bharadvāja Gr Sū*, I 1 ff , *Pāraskara Gr Sū* II 2 II 5, *Vasistha Dh. Sū* XI 55 ff., *Baudhāyana Gr Sū* II 5, *Kāth Gr Sū*, XLI 10 ff., *Gaut Dh. Sū*, I 15 ff., *Mānava Gr Sū*, I 22 ff , *Gobhila Gr Sū.* I 2 ff., *Khadira Gr Sū.*, II 4 ff *Śān Gr Sū*, II 1 ff., *Manu* II 41 ff, *Yājñavalkya*, I 18 ff., etc.

*Aitareya* passage (I 3) quoted above, we came across more primitive forms in which the method of obtaining a second birth through *initiation is described The Atharvaveda, although refers to the* Brahmacārin gathering fuel and begging alms for the teacher and also to prayers for liturgical employment at the ceremony of initiation, does not throw any light on the primitive forms of Upanayana Nor does the *Rgveda*, the oldest of our materials, in which we come across no explicit reference to the ceremony of the Upanayana

We find that instead of giving any description of the original rituals of the Upanayana, the earlier texts only prescribe some codified rules The tradition behind such codification is practically absent in all the texts This silence requires an explanation The word *Upanayana* literally means 'the drawing near or leading forth (of a boy for study under the teacher)' The prefix *upa* is significant which also denotes something 'secret' and which has often some bearing on matters sexual So many words beginning with *upa* are found in Sanskrit having both the senses contained in them It appears that the present grammatical derivation of the word Upanayana is based upon the changed significance of the original rite which had some esoteric elements One should not fail to recall in this connection that in tribal initiation, it has been observed that, the whole ceremony is secret, performed at a distance from the settlement, and often preceded by a probationary period of seclusion When the novice returns to the settlement he is strictly forbidden to reveal to the uninitiated anything that he has done or heard or seen [6] From this point of view if we are inclined to think that originally the Upanayana ceremony, quite in accordance with the tribal mode of initiation, contained some esoteric rituals and that they were not recorded either because they were esoteric or because in subsequent ages with the change in the social values they lost their importance, we shall not be wrong, so far as formal reasoning is concerned But to establish this from the view point of material logic, it is necessary at first to prove that the Upanayana is definitely a modification of *tribal puberty rites and that many features of the latter form integral* part of the former

### 4. Upanayana and Puberty

Manu (II 36) says that a Brahmana boy should undergo through

6 Webster, *op cit*, pp 49 50

such restrictions are needed

Thirdly, the knowledge which the initiated one is expected to have is mainly religious in character Every religious system prescribes some sort of initiation at puberty as an introduction to the system of religious life Even, in many a backward society, still surviving in different parts of the world, a man cannot have any religious function unless he has undergone the necessary initiatory rites at puberty Among the natives of South East Australia an uninitiated person is thought to be a stupid, idiotic sort of man, unworthy of receiving the honours of their ceremonies, and frequently addressed as a boy although he is an oldish man [12] "When an individual reaches the full development of puberty, he or she undergoes a ceremony which entitles him or her on its successful completion to a certain social rank or status in the community As life progresses, other and higher ranks are progressively attainable for each sex,[13] until the highest and the most honourable grade that enjoyed by an old man, or an old woman, is reached "[14]

## 5. Buddhist and Jain Initiation

Let us now view the whole thing in terms of the methods of religious initiation We begin with Jainism One of the leading features of this religion is that there is a close union between the laymen and monks in matters of religious life This is proved by the similarity of their religious duties which differ not in kind but in degree This has enabled Jainism to avoid fundamental changes within The followers of Jainism have to undergo initiatory rites at puberty Many of their rites resemble those of the Brāhmanas and Buddhists, since all these have been inherited from the tribal rites practised from time immemorial The Jain Saṅgha like that of the Buddhists was modelled after the surviving tribal organisations of the sixth century B C The head of the Jain Sangha was called *Ganadhara*, 'one who holds the tribe', i e tribal chief The order of the monks is recruited chiefly from novices entering it at puberty A monk entering the order takes the five great vows (*vratas*) which were originally nothing but close adherence to some strictly tribal values

12 A W Howitt, *Native Tribes of South East Australia* London 1904 p 530

13 Cf *maturagre adhijananam dvitiyam mauñjibandhane|*
*trtiyam yajñadikṣayām dvijasya srutıcodanal||*

14 H L Roth *Natives of Sarawak and British North Borneo*, London 1896, p 169

the lowest age limit was fixed at the eighth year of the boy This assumption can be substantiated by the fact that in one of his discourses Lord Buddha expressly forbids to confer pravrajvā on a boy under fifteen years of age [19]

In Tibet, a Śrāmanera can receive a second initiation in his sixteenth year, in China the ceremony of hair-shaving is performed usually at the same age The 'pagan accrescences', in the language of Kern, are due to influences of the local initiatory rites [20] The Srāmanera, male or female, might undergo some sort of specialisation, if they desired [21] They have to learn the ten *Śiksāpadas* [22] The rule now followed in Ceylon[23] is exactly the counterpart of the Brahmanical Upanayana [24] The rite of Pravrajyā is very simple The boy desirous to be initiated will first choose a *vihara* and approach the elder He has to shave his hairs, wear the yellow robe and make a declaration of the *Trisarana* or three refuges

In Nepal, the initiation is called *abhiṣeka* in which primitive elements can easily be detected The teacher in charge of the candidate prepares a pot (*kalasa*) full of water and puts into it a lotus made of gold, five brands of sweetmeats, five drugs, five flowers and threads of five colours are provided On the first day the student has to sit on *Vajrāsana* and recite the three refuges On the second day, the teacher gives three protections The first is Vajraraksā which the teacher provides him by placing a *vajra* (symbolised by a flower) on the head The second is Loharaksā or protection from or by iron which is performed by placing three iron padlocks on the belly and shoulders of the boy The third is Agniraksā or protection from fire and this is performed by placing a wine pot on the head Then is performed *Kalasa abhiṣeka* which is sprinkling of holv water from a *Kalasa* or vessel Then comes the head priest and gives a silver ring to the boy On the third day the boy's hairs are shaved and then he is favoured with the *triratna* and the precepts [25]

19 *Mahāvagga*, I 50
20 H Kern, *Manual of Indian Buddhism*, Strassburg 1898, p 78 n, S Hardy, *op cit*, pp 45 ff
21 *Sutta vibhanga*, II 139
22 *Mahāvagga*, I 56
23 Hardy, *op cit*, p 23
24 Kern, *op cit*, p 78
25 B H Hodgson, *Religion and Literature of the Nepalese Buddhists*, London 1874, p XV, 212

*tribal adoption* The tribes often grant membership to persons who are not their natural kinsmen How this adoption takes place may be illustrated with reference to the adoption of Morgan by the Hawk clan of the Seneca tribe "After the people had assembled at the council house, one of the chiefs made an address giving some account of the person, the reason for his adoption, the name and gens of the person adopting, and the name bestowed upon the novitiate Two chiefs taking the person by the arms then marched with him through the council house and back, chanting the song of adoption To this the people responded in musical chorus at the end of each verse The march continued until the verses were ended, which required three rounds With this the ceremony concluded "[28]

This ritual of tribal adoption is expected to throw some light on the Upasampadā ceremony as found in the *Mahāvagga* (I 28, I 76, etc ) 'Then the Blessed one thus addressed the Bhikkhus I prescribe, O Bhikkhus, that you confer the *Upasampadā* ordination by a formal act of the order in which the announcement (*natti*) is followed by three questions And you ought, O Bhikkhus, to confer the *Upasampadā* ordination in this way Let a learned, competent Bhikkhu proclaim the following *natti* (announcement of a resolution) before the Saṅgha Let the Saṅgha, reverend Sirs, hear me This person N N desires to receive the *upasampadā* ordination from the venerable N N (i e with the venerable N N as his *upājjhaya*) If the Saṅgha is ready, let the Saṅgha confer on N N the *upasampadā* ordination with N N as *upājjhāya* This is the *natti* And for the second time I am speaking to you Let the Saṅgha (etc as before) And for the third time I thus speak to you Let the Saṅgha (etc. as before) N N has received the *upasampadā* ordination from the Saṅgha with N N as *upājjhāya* The Saṅgha is in favour of it, therefore it is silent Thus I understand '[29]

## 7 Primitive Rituals Connected with Upanayana

From the fragmentary nature of the materials themselves it is rather impossible to come to any definite conclusion in the case of

28. Chattopadhyaya *Lokāyata* p. 473, Cf Morgan *Ancient Society* pp 80-81
29 *Sacred Books of the East* Vol. XIII p. 169-70

*Mahabhārata* and other texts, and which is still performed in India by the wandering ascetics, is perhaps a development of the ancient puberty rites in which speech was tabooed to a limited extent among certain social groups

The rite of hair shaving, which is a prominent feature of the Omahas, Pawness, Dakotas, Peublos and other tribes,[37] forms a significant part of the ceremony of Upanayana The Buddhist initiation (*Pravrajyā*) also requires hair shaving as an integral part of the ceremony This holds good also in the case of the Jains There is also a rite of the same nature called *caula* or *cudākarma* or *cudākarana* which is to be performed on the first or the third year of the boy, according to the rules prescribed by the Gṛhyasutras Now a days, the said rite generally takes place on the day of Upanayana But this rite appears to be the development of an older puberty rite called *Keśanta* or *Godana* which was to be performed in the 16th year for the Brāhmanas, 22nd year for the *Kṣatriyas* and 24th year for the Vaisyas (cf *Manu*, II 5) Traces of this rite are found in the *Śatapatha Brāhmana* III 2 4, the *Śānkhyāyana Gṛhyasutra* I 28 20-22 etc and also in the Smṛtis Bhavabhuti in the first act of the *Uttararāmacarita* says that Rāma and Sita had also to perform this rite According to the Gṛhyasutras like *Āśvalāyana* I 17, 18 and later texts like *Samskaraprakāśa* 317 or *Samskāranamālā* 904 the rites of Kesanta or Godana and Cudakarana may also be performed by the girls According to Frazer, some races think that the spirit lives in the head and it is important not to disturb this spirit more than is necessary As among the Greeks, the hair is itself regarded as the seat of life The Biblical story of Samson suggests a widespread belief that the hair itself as a source of mysterious power The same belief prevails in the Semitic countries also[38] In different parts of South India, hair is regarded sacred and the burning of an enemy's hair is an interesting feature of the black magic[39] The Spartan women used to cut their hair at puberty[40]

Like hair shaving, *Karnavedha* or ear piercing forms an essential part of the puberty rites of tribal India[41] It is interesting to note that earlier Indian texts are silent about this rite It is only mention

37 *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* Vol VI p. 477
38 W Robertson Smith *Religion of the Semites* London 1899 pp 337 ff
39 E. Thurston *Omens and Superstitions of South India* London 1912 pp 53 115
40 Plutarch *Lykurgus*, XV 4
41 Crooke in *Journal of the Anthropological Institute* XXVIII, p 246

ed in the *Vyāsa Smṛti* and in the *Katyāyana sūtra*, a supplement to the *Pāraskara Gṛhyasūtra* The *Smṛti-candrikā* of Devanna bhatta gives a brief note on Karnavedha A faint reference of this rite may be traced in *Nirukta* II 4 Referring to the rite of ear piercing observed by the Gond and other Central Indian tribes Russel says that this particular rite should be explained in terms of fertility magic since the lobe made in the ear is supposed to have some sympathetic effect in opening the womb and making the child birth easy[42] Jevons considers it to be a survival of offering of blood to the deity[43] Crawley thinks it to be a relic of the physical mutilations performed by the savages and holds that "when we find that the mouth and lips, teeth, nose, eyes, ears and genital organs are subjected to such processes, we may infer that the object is to secure the safety of these sense organs by what is practically a permanent amulet or charm "[44] It is clear, therefore, that such rites as ear piercing have a magical or mysterious significance in the outlook of our primitive ancestors, and this has been revealed in certain features of puberty rites and in the rituals of the Upanayana

According to the Dharmasutras[45] and also the Smrtis,[46] the initiated one has to observe a number of taboos, the most important of which is that he should observe complete celebacy He must not masturbate and if he suffers from night emissions he should make a penance He should not indulge in sexual affairs and speak with women He must not clasp the feet of his teacher's wives, assist them at their toilet, wash their feet and shampoo them Abstinence from taking intoxicating drinks, dancing, singing and sexual enjoyments is also demanded in the ten precepts of the Buddhists These taboos, especially in sexual matters, have been interpreted by various scholars from different viewpoints In my *Indian Mother Goddess* (Calcutta 1970) I have tried to explain these in terms of the patriarchal values which were being aggressively imposed upon Indian life with the growth of private property as the driving force of society and which therefore demanded absolute chastity of women These taboos are in striking agreement with those found among various

42 R V Russell, *Ethnological Survey of the Central Provinces* Allahabad 1911 VII, pp. 99 ff
43 F Jevons *Introduction to the History of Religion*, London 1896 pp 171 ff
44 A E. Crawley *The Mystic Rose* London 1902 p 135
45 *Āpastamba* I 1 2 21-30 *Baudh* I 2 34-37 *Gaut* II 13 ff etc.
46 Cf *Manu* II 181 ff. *Yājñavalkya* I 33 etc.

tribes of India who have developed a *patriarchal* form of social organisation This also holds good in case of some peoples outside India In Bengal, there is a custom that when the ceremony of Upanayana takes place, no woman is allowed to be present on that spot Among the Thongas the site where the initiatory ceremony takes place is not to be seen by the women [47] In Australia, it is the general custom that the novice must avoid women during the rites, among the Narrinyeris, he should not take food from a woman, among the Kanaris, he must not even eat a female animal [48]

## 8. Conclusion

That the Upanayana ceremony through which the initiated one is expected to have a rebirth to obtain full manhood is originally a development of the primitive tribal puberty rites intended for the same purpose has been supposed by most of the scholars who have worked on this subject But there has been no attempt to substantiate this supposition, which is likely to be quite correct, by evidence from different sources scattered around us We have taken this subject not with the purpose of establishing anything but, as we have stated above, with that of tapping different sources in order that they might themselves offer some suggestivity Whether they really do so depends on the nature of the evidences we have been able to derive from the ritualistic contents of the Brāhmana literature, of the Dharma and Gṛhya Sūtras and of the Smṛtis and to correlate them with the surviving tribal rites of India and elsewhere But something must have transpired which may be utilised as clues to the understanding of the social processes through which the traditional norms and institutions of ancient India came into existence, and in the remaining chapters our attempt will be to make these clues more explicit by studying the essentials of other kindred rituals which we consider to be of greater historical significance in the social context of India

47 H Junod, *Life of a South African Tribe* London 1927 Vol I p 77
48 A W Howitt *Native Tribes of South East Australia*, London 1904, pp 670 74

# V

# SACRED AND ACCURSED

## A Study in the Menstrual Rites of Ancient India

### 1. Prologue: Initiation into Womanhood

Initiation into womanhood is of more far-reaching significance than that into manhood in primitive belief In fact, the signs of puberty are more explicit in the girls than in the boys The rites of the first menstruation are the most invariable and the most strictly observed of all the rites of primitive humanity All the world over, not only among the primitive peoples, but also among peoples on a far higher cultural plane, the forms of rites attaching to the first menstruation are similar In primitive belief, menstruation was thought to be the effect of sexual intercourse, and the latter was, therefore, accounted necessary for the establishment of the physiological function [1] Hence precocious sexual intercourse was not merely looked upon as permissible, but as indispensable, and was encouraged and enjoined This may explain why ceremonial de-*floration is in* many cases an *important* feature of the puberty *rites* of the girls Among the Nayars, for example, defloration had to take place before puberty 'in order that the girl may not be deflowered by the regular operation of nature'

### 2. The Universal Dread

There is a deeply ingrained dread which the primitive man universally entertains of menstrual blood The Australian tribes strictly seclude their women at their monthly courses [2] Among the Bagandas, a menstruating woman cannot drink milk, come into contact with any milk vessel and touch anything belonging to her husband They believe that if a menstruating woman handles

1 R Briffault, *The Mothers*, London 1952, Vol II, p 447

2 Howitt, *op cit*, pp 776 ff

anything of her husband, he will surely fall ill, if she touches his weapons, he will certainly be killed in the next battle, if she touches a well, it will surely go dry [3] Among the Bhuiyas of South Mirzapur, menstrual blood is dreaded much [4] Among the Kharwars of the same region, a menstruous woman is kept in outer house she is not allowed to enter the kitchen or cowshed, nor can she touch the cooking vessels [5] The South Indian women generally seclude themselves at their monthly periods and observe a number of rules such as not to drink milk, not to milk cows, not to touch fire, not to lie on a high bed, not to walk on common paths, not to walk by the side of flowering plants and not to observe heavenly bodies [6]

Pliny's account of the dreadful effects produced by a menstruating woman expresses substantially the beliefs which are current among most of the rural populations of Europe (*Natural History*, VII 64 f, XVII, 226, XXVIII 38, 44, 65, 67, 73, 77, 81, 82, 84, 85, cf Columella's *De re Rustica* X 358 ff, XI 3, 38, 50, 64, Cassinus Bassu's *Geoponica*, I 15, X 2, 3, 14, 64, XII 2, 5, 8, 20, 25, XVI 2 10, Porphyry's *De abstinentia* III 3, Dioscorides' *Materia Medica*, II 99) Menstrual blood is also dreaded in the Mosaic Law Book of the *Holy Bible* (*Leviticus* XV) as well as in the *Quran* (II 122, II 228) The Brahmanical Law Books hold that the menstruating woman must be dreaded [7] A woman during her menstrual period must remain untouched by anyone (*Atri*, 27-80, *Yama*, 54 62), unseen by any Brāhmana engaged in dinner (*Manu* III 229), be treated on the first day as *cāndālī*, on the second as *brahmaghātinī* and on the third as *rajakī* (*Angiras* 35-39, *Āpastamba* VII 4, *Parāśara* VII 19) and be excluded from all sorts of religious, social and even funeral rites

The Purānas also attach great importance to the menstrual flow of women In the *Varāha Purāna* there is a full chapter (CXLII) devoted to the menstrual taboos One must not talk with her (*Agni*, CLV 25, *Kūrma* II 16 36) nor eat anything offered by her (*Kūrma*, II 92 30) *Mantras* should not be recited before

3 J Roscoe *The Baganda*, London 1911, pp 96, 419, 459

4 W Crooke, *Tribes and Castes of the North Western Provinces and Oudh*, Calcutta, 1896, II, p 87

5 *North Indian Notes and Queries*, I, p 57

6 L K A K Iyer *Cochin Tribes and Castes* Vol I p 201 ff.

7 *Manu*, IV 40-42, *Āpastamba*, VII, *Visnu* XXII 71 72, LXXVI 7, LXXXI 6, *Parāśara* VII 15-20, *Devalya*, 146-54, *Bṛhat-parāśara* VII, 226-36, *Laghuyama*, 12 17, etc

her (*Śiva*, Sanatkumāra, XXIII 34) and to make sexual intercourse with her is regarded as one of the greatest sins (*Vāmana* XIV, 40) If she touches anyone she has to perform a number of penances (*Agni*, CLXX 34, 42) Menstruating women are also dreaded in the older works Thus, in the Gṛhyasūtras we find that a student must not see a woman in her courses (*Śānkhyāyana* II 12 10, IV. 11 6) After the Samāvartana (graduation) he must be careful at least for three days so that he may not come across a menstruating woman (*Paraskara* IV 7 48) Vedas must not be recited before her (*Sānkhyāyana* IV 7 48) Those who have retired from family life should not also see a woman in this condition (*ibid*, VI 1 3) A student must not talk or play with girls in their menses (*Khadira* III 1 36, *Gobhila* III 5 6)

### 3. The Sanctifying Significance

This terror attaching to the primitive taboo on the menstruating woman was not, in the primitive and original form of the conception, the deeply ingrained dread for impurity and unholiness As I have already pointed out in my *Indian Puberty Rites*, this attitude was a subsequent development which was caused by the influence of patriarchal values There are also many instances in which menstrual blood had developed a sanctifying and purifying influence Thus in the matriarchal Tantras it is regarded so sacred that it is prescribed as an offering to the Great Goddess and her consort In some of the Purānas it is stated that the monthly periods of women must not be misused (*Viṣnu*, III 8, *Garuda* I 95 20) According to the *Vāyu* (VIII 42, 84-85) and the *Brahmānda* (VIII 82-84) Purānas, in olden times women used to menstruate only once in their life and it is in the *Kali* age that the present system of monthly courses has been introduced The *Garuda Purāna* (I 95 20) says that a woman cannot become pure until she has her monthly courses and the view is also found in the *Mahabhārata* (XII 35) In the *Arthasastra* of Kautilya (III 153) it is explicitly stated that the menstruation of a woman should be properly utilised In case of the husband's concealing the fact of his wife's being in menses or neglecting to lie with her after her menses, he shall pay a fine of 96 *panas* In many scattered passages of the *Mahābharata* it is stated that a woman's courses should be rendered fruitful In the story of Utańka we find how a woman intending to commit adultery with her husband's

disciple makes the plea of her menstruation In the Pāndu-Kuntī discourses we find that if a woman had sex relation with a man other than her husband it was regarded as an act of adultery, but if she did so in order to make her menstruation fruitful it was no crime at all

The primitive people instinctively projected their own experiences into the objects around them and thus associated various ideas so as to constitute a practical philosophy of life, making unconscious use of the principle of analogy This empiric approach led them to think that natural productivity should be viewed in terms of human productivity, earth mother in terms of human-mother The same preconditions which fertilise women are also thought to fertilise Mother Earth As for example, in Bengal, it is believed that, at the first fall of the rains, Mother Earth menstruates in order to prepare herself for her fertilising work A stone is set up on the ground, the top of which is smeared with vermilion, a mark of the menstrual blood of the goddess During this menstrual period, *there is an entire cessation of all ploughing, sowing and other* farm work [8] In the Deccan, after the *Navarātra,* her temple is closed from the tenth to the full-moon day while she rests and refreshes herself [9] In the Punjab Mother Earth sleeps for a week in each month [10] A similar rite of purification is also made in the case of the goddess Bhagavatī in her temple at Kerala [11] In the Malabar region Mother Earth rests during the hot weather until she gets the first shower of rain [12] In many parts of India great importance is attached to the menstruation of the goddess Pārvatī [13] Reference must be made in this connection to the menstruation of the goddess Kāmakhyā of Assam

## 4 The Life-Giving Power

Thomson writes "It is important to observe that the magic of human fecundity attaches to the process, not to the result to the lochial discharge, not to the child itself, and consequently all fluxes of blood, menstrual as well as lochial, are treated alike as

8 E. A Gait, *Census Report* 1901, *Bengal,* Vol I p 189
9 M M Underhill *Hindu Religious Year*, Calcutta 1921, p 31
10 *North Indian Notes and Queries*, II, p 172
11 V Nagam Aiya *Travancore State Manual*, Vol II, Trivandrum 1906, pp 89 ff.
12 L. K. A K. Iyer, *op cit.*, Vol II, pp 78 ff
13 *Indian Antiquary*, Vol XVIII pp 159 ff

The well known examples come from South Africa, found among the Zulus and Awa nkondes, the Barotses of Upper Zambesi, the Thongas of Delagoa Bay, the Caffre tribes, and the Basutos and the Bavili tribes of Lower Congo The Americas provide examples of first menstrual rites observed by the Chinook Indians, Nukta Indians, Hadia Indians, Tlingit or Kolash Indians of Alaska, Tinne Indians of Columbia, Thompson Indians, Lillooet Indians, Shuswap Indians, Guaranis of Southern Brazil, Chiriguanos and Yuracares of Bolivia, Matacos of Granchaco, Macusis of Guiana, Koniagas, Malemuts, Unalits, Hupa, Wintun, Pend' Oreilles and Musquakie Indians and many other tribes[19]

In Torres Straits, when a girl shows signs of her initial bleeding, a circle of bushes is made in a dark corner of the house and the girl is secluded there for three months She must not see the sun and be seen by any male member of the house She is forbidden to eat turtle or turtle eggs At the end of three months she becomes free again through a grand ceremony[20] In Kabadi, a district of British New Guinea, "daughters of chiefs, when they are about 12 or 13 years of age, are kept indoors for two or three years, never being allowed, under any pretence, to descend from the house, and the house is so shaded that the sun cannot shine on them"[21] In Cambodia a girl at her first menstruation has to stay under a mosquito curtain for a hundred days, though at present four, five, ten or twenty days are thought enough She has to observe a number of rules such as not to be seen by a stranger, not to eat flesh or fish, not to go to the pagoda and so on[22] In Ceylon, when the girl has her first monthly course, she has to undergo a confinement

19 D Kidd, *The Essential Kaffir*, London 1904, pp 209 ff, G Gouldsbury and H Sheane, *The Great Plateau of Northern Nigeria* London 1911, pp 158-60, H H Johnston *British Central Africa*, London 1917, p 411, L. Decle, *Three Years in Savage Africa*, London 1898 p 78 H Junod *Life of a South African Tribe*, London 1927, Vol I p 178, E Casatis *The Basutos*, London 1861 p 268 R. E. Dennet, *At the Back of the Black Man's Mind* London 1906, S Powers *Tribes of California* Washington 1877, pp 85, 265 ff, F Boas *Chinook Texts*, Washington 1896 pp 246 ff, J R Swanton *Ethnology of the Hadia*, London 1905, pp 110 ff, H H Bancroft, *Native Races of the Pacific States*, London 1885, Vol I, pp 110 ff, H W Bates *The Naturalist on the Amazons*, London 1973, p 382, G E. Church, *Aborigines of South America*, London 1912, pp 207 27, etc.

20 *Jour Anthro Inst*, Vol. XXIX, pp 212 ff

21 J Chalmirs and W Gillen, *Works and Adventures in New Guinea*, London 1885, p 159

22 J Moura, *La Royaume du Cambodge*, Paris 1883, Vol I, p. 377

of two weeks During this period of seclusion, she must remain unseen by the males When the period of seclusion is over, she comes back with her face covered by hands A ceremonial bath of purification is then followed under a *jak* tree Sometimes the hut, in which she was confined, is burnt [23]

## 6. The Indian Context

In 1891, S C Bose wrote that when a Hindu maiden reached maturity she was kept in a dark room for four days, forbidden to see the sun, regarded unclean and untouchable, fed on boiled rice, milk, sugar, curd and tamarind, led to neighbouring tank on the fifth day accompanied by five married women and smeared with turmeric water [24] *He evidently thought of Bengalee women only when he* generalised the custom

However, we find that menstrual rites, observed on the attainment of a girl's puberty, are in vogue among the backward tribes and castes of Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Madras, Andhra, Mysore, Kerala and also among some matrilineal tribes scattered in different parts of India In the case of some higher castes also the menstrual rites hold good Thus, the Rarhi Brahmins of Bengal compel a girl at puberty to live alone, and do not allow her to see the face of any male For three days she remains shut up in a dark room and has to undergo some penances She must not eat fish, flesh, egg or sweetmeat, she must live on rice and clarified butter [25] Among the Deshast Brahmins, the first menstruation of a girl is celebrated The secluded girl sits on a little throne and is attended constantly by a Maratha maid servant The neighbours and relatives pay visits, bring presents for her and wash her in oil [26] The Aradhya Brahmins of Mysore observe the first menstruation with a ceremonial bath [27] The Dikshitar Brahmins of South India also perform the first menstruation celebration with pomp and splendour, the rites being essentially similar to those of the Nayars [28] The

23 *Indian Antiquary*, Vol. XXXI p 380

24 S C. Bose *The Hindus as They Are*, London 1891 p 86

25 H Risley, *Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, Calcutta 1891, Vol I, p 152

26 H Risley *Census of India* 1901, I B Ethnographic Appendices p 118

27 H V Nanjundayya and L. K. A K. Iyer, *The Mysore Tribes and Castes*, Mysore, 1928-35, Vol. II p 36

28 E. Thurston and K. Rangachari, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India* Madras 1909, Vol. I, p 340

Malayalam-speaking Ksatriyas of the same region also seclude their girls at the first menstruation [29]

The Kadirs of Kerala and other regions of South India seclude their girls in a hut during the commencement of their first menstruation [30] Among the Pulayans or Cherumans, the girl has to remain secluded for seven days With her seven friends she has to dip in a river and then paint her face in yellow In the period of her seclusion no one else may enter the hut, not even her mother Women stand a little way off and lay down food for her At the end of the time she is brought home, clad in a new clean cloth, and friends are honoured with betel nut, *toddy* and *arack* [31] Among the Tiyans of Madura, a girl is thought to be polluted for four days from the beginning of her first menstruation She has to reside in the northern side of the house and sleep on a grass mat Another girl keeps her company and sleeps with her, and the girl concerned must not touch any person, tree or plant and see the sky Her diet must be strictly vegetarian, without salt She has also to keep a knife with her [32] More or less similar puberty rites are found among the Kappilions of Madura and Tinnevelly[33] as well as among the Parivarams of Madura [34] The menstrual rites of the Parayans or Malas are similar to those of the Pulayans described above [35]

The puberty rites of the Nayars are called *thirandukuli* The girl concerned has to remain secluded in a room In the room there must be a lamp, a brass pot, a bundle of cocoanut blossoms and other things The girl holds a handled mirror made of a round brass plate The event is properly announced among the relatives The neighbouring women visit the girl and dress her in new garments On the third day the relatives and friends are invited The *Manans* and *Velans* arrive on the fourth day The menstruating girl along with her other girl friends undergoes a ceremonial bath The whole party then returns in procession The ceremony is followed by a great feast The *Velans* sing before the assembly

29 N K. Pillai *Census of India Travancore*, 1931, Vol XXVIII, p 374
30 L. K A K Iyer, *The Cochin Tribes and Castes*, Vol I, p 5, II, p 11
31 Thurston and Rangachari, *op cit*, II, p 65, Iyer, *op cit*, I, pp 98-99, Pillai, *op cit*, p 161, S Mateer, *Native Life of Travancore* London 1883 p 45
32 Thurston and Rangachari *op cit*, VII, pp 63 ff
33 *ibid*, III, p 218
34 *ibid*, VI p 157
35 Iyer, *op cit*, I p 76.

Sometimes the girl is led to a neighbouring house On her return, drums are beaten and shouts of joy are given Sometimes the feast is postponed to a more suitable day before the completion of which the girl is not allowed to enter the kitchen or go to the temple for worship [36]

Similar rites are observed among such southern tribes and castes as the Haddi, Jalari, Jogi, Kapu, Karna sale, Kuruba, Muka Dora, Mutracha, Maravan, Mala, Toreya, Tsakala, Bili Magga, Budubuduki, Darizi Dasari, Domb, Gangadikara Okkalu, Ganiga, Golla, Halepaik, Halikar Okkaliga, Hasalar, Helava, Holeya, Idiga, Jain, Jangala, Jetti, Kacha Gauliga, Kare Okkalu, Kille-Kyata, Komati, Koracha, Kumbara, Kunchitiga, Ladar, Mediga, Meda, Mondaru, Nagartha, Nattuvan, Nayinda, Patvegara, Reddi, Sadaru, Salahuva Vakkalu, Padma Sale, Saniyasi, Satani, Tigala, Togata, Uppara, Wodda and so on [37]

The first menstruation is also regarded as an occasion of ceremonial importance among some tribes and castes of Central India like the Gonds, Halabas, Kaikaris, Marathas, Kamars, Koshtis, Kunbis, Kurmis, Lodhis, Pardhis, etc [38] Among the Gonds, there is, or was till lately, a building, out of the sight of the village, to which women in this condition retired Their relatives brought them food and deposited it outside the hut, and not until they had gone away did a woman dare to come out and take it It was believed that the greater evil would befall any one who looked upon a woman during her state of impurity [39] Similar precautions are also taken by the Santals and the Mundas [40]

## 7. The Ceremonial Defloration

Another form of puberty rites of the girls is ceremonial defloration which is closely connected with the menstrual rites Previously it was widely current in different parts of India and the custom is still surviving among a good number of backward tribes It seems

36 Thurston *op cit.*, VI, p 316, Iyer, *op cit.*, II, pp 27 30, Pillai, *op cit*, p 162
37 Thurston, *op cit*, Vols I VII *Passim*, Nanjundayya and Iyer, *op cit.*, Vols. I IV, *passim*
38 R. V Russell and Hiralal, *Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces*, London 1916, Vols. I IV, *passim.*
39 *ibid*, III, p 83, IV, p 67
40 E T Dalton *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*, Calcutta 1872, pp 191, 214, 279

probable that the *talikettu* or marriage ceremony existing among the Nayars of Kerala is a relic of ceremonial defloration Captain Hamilton referred to the ceremonial defloration of the queen of Zamorin by the Namboodri priest Duarte Barbosa recorded incidents of ceremonial deflorations through which the Nayar maids were introduced into womanhood[41] The custom of ceremonial defloration by the family priest was also current in different parts of Bengal which was known as *Guruprasadi*

These customary rites were not codified due to the increasing influence of patriarchy which demanded absolute chastity of women Thus, in the law books the function of ritual defloration was entrusted to the husband In the Gṛhyasūtras[42] there is a rite called *Caturthīkarma* (rite on the fourth day after marriage) which was nothing but a rite of ceremonial defloration The Gṛhyasūtras explicitly say that on the fourth night the bridegroom must deflower the bride with the recital of a number of *mantras* It was originally a puberty rite, but as the marriageable age of the girls came down, it appears that the rite of *Caturthīkarma* was discontinued and that the rite was performed long after the ritual of marriage and appropriately named *Garbhādhāna* There is another rite called *Ṛtusangamana*, also called *Niṣeka*[43] as distinct from *Garbhādhāna* which may be a relic of some older forms of ceremonial defloration on or before the commencement of the first menstruation It is interesting to note that while performing the sexual act according to the rules prescribed in the *Caturthīkarma*, the husband had to recite those passages from the *Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* which identify sexual union with sacrifice (For details see Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra*, II pp 203 ff) Relics of menstrual rites are also found in the *Strī ācāra*, in the *Snāpana*, *Paridhāpana* and *Samnahana* rites,[44] in the *Tailaharidrāropana* and others

Among the several requirements of the bride to be chosen, the Gṛhyasūtras lay down that she must be a *nagnikā* The word

41 See H Risley, *Peoples of India*, p 200, M Billington, *Woman in India*, London 1895, p 80, G Panikkar, *Malabar and Its Folk*, Madras 1900, p 143, D Barbosa, *Description of the Coasts of East Africa and Malabar*, Hakluyt Society, p 126, L. Moore, *Malabar Law and Custom*, Madras 1905, p 70

42 *Gobhila*, II 5, *Saṅkhyāyana* I 18 19, *Khadira*, I 4 12 16, *Pāraskara*, I 11, *Āpastamba*, VIII 10 11, *Hiranyakeśi* I 23 24

43 Cf *Vaikhanasa*, I 1, III 9, VI 2

44 *Āpastamba G S*, IV 8, *Kaṭhaka*, XXV 4, *Paraskara*, I 4, *Gobhila*, II 1 10 18, *Mānava*, I 11 46

*Nagnika* is variously explained by the commentators Matrdatta, the commentator on the *Hiranyakesi Grhyasutra,* holds that *nagnika* means 'one whose menstrual period is near' i e, one who is fit for sexual intercourse But Astāvakra, the commentator on the *Manava Grhyasutra,* says that *nagnika* means one who has not yet experienced the impulses and emotions of the new stage of life (cf *Vasistha Dharmasutra* XVII 70) In the *Gautama Dharmasutra* (XVIII 20 23) it is said that a girl should be given in marriage at puberty, she is allowed to remain virgin until her third menstruation Manu holds three contradictory opinions, the first of which is that a maiden may rather live unmarried, but the father should never give her to one who is devoid of good qualities (IX 89) But in some of the Dharmasūtras and Smrtis it is stated that the father incurs the sin of destroying an embryo at each appearance of menses as long as the girl is unmarried [45] Again, Manu says that a maiden after attaining puberty may wait for three years but after this period she may find out a man for her (IX 90) This also finds support in the Dharmasūtras [46] In another place Manu explicitly says that a man of thirty should marry a girl of twelve while a man of twenty four should marry a girl of eight years (IX 94) This view is shared by the *Mahābhārata* though in some parts of the same text quite a different view is expressed

From the time of the *Rgveda* (X 85 40 41) there was a mystical belief that Soma, Gandharva and Agni were the divine guardians of a girl, and according to the *Grhyasamgraha,* quoted in the commentary on the *Gobhila Grhyasutra* III 4 6 and the *Pāraskara Grhyasutra* (I 4 16), Soma enjoys a girl when she developes her pubic hairs, Gandharva enjoys her when she develops her breasts and Agni enjoys her when she menstruates [47] This is frankly a mythological expression of the primitive puberty rites pointing to ceremonial defloration of a girl by at least three individuals And this myth was subsequently utilised by patriarchal law makers in order to explain and support the cause of child marriage and to declare that a girl must be married before she develops the signs of maturity

45 *Vasistha,* VII 70-71, *Baudhayana,* IV 1 12, *Yājñavalkya,* I 64, etc.
46 Cf *Baudhāyana,* IV 1 40
47 Cf *Samvarta Samhitā,* 64-67

## 8. Remarks

In India, puberty rites are found not only among the backward peoples *surviving in tribal stage, but also among peoples belonging* to the higher grades of culture, though, with the rapid growth of industrialisation and urbanism, these rites are fading away fast It is found that in many cases the rituals of a particular group are adopted, either in the original or in a changed form, by another group often belonging to a higher level of culture As for example, relics of tribal menstrual rites, the most invariable and the most strictly observed of all the rites of primitive humanity, are abundantly found in the marriage rituals of the higher castes Traces of ceremonial defloration may also be found in the now obsolete ritual called *Caturthīkarma* The Brahmanical Upanayana has retained traces of the primitive initiatory rites Many of its leading features are in close agreement with the fundamentals of puberty rites performed by the tribes of various orders

The adoption of the ritual of a particular group of people by another group is essentially connected with the social changes caused by the 'shifting tensions' in the primitive mode of food production The pastoral tribes must have borrowed or inherited many of their ritual features from the hunting tribes, since hunting led to the domestication of cattle In the second pastoral grade, as the case is with the so called Vedic Indians, when stock raising was supplemented by agriculture, some agricultural features were also incorporated in the pastoral rituals In the later Samhitas and the Brahmanas, for example, we have reference to agricultural rituals while they are conspicuously absent in the earlier portions of the *Rgveda* The same process holds good in the case of the agricultural tribes Of the three agricultural grades, as is well known, the third *is supplemented by stock raising As is evident, the rites of the* first menstruation, etc were obviously connected with agricultural tribes, since the relation between the processes of birth and generation and those of fertility *in general appeared to be very* intimate in primitive thought In the next chapter we shall see how the two aspects of the same mystery found very similar modes of ritual expression

# VI

# EARTH AND WOMAN

## A Study in the Cults and Rituals of Fertility

### 1. Prologue

In the first chapter of this work we have seen how sexual acts were intimately connected with primitive religious rituals and cited a few passages from the ancient Vedic texts in which sexual union was identified with the performance of Vedic sacrifices like the *Vajapeya*, etc In the fourth and fifth chapters we have held that the reason of establishing such relation between the sexual and religious aspects of human life must be traced to the primitive beliefs centering round the ideas of fertility and procreation The ritualistic contents of the Brahmana literature, of the Dharma and Gṛhya Sūtras, of the Smṛtis and Purānas, are sophisticated developments and codifications of the ideas arising out of such primitive beliefs and this can be shown if we take into consideration the *rites de passage* marking separation from childhood and entrance into manhood or womanhood and the beliefs clustering round the physical features of women as well as their application in determining the sexual relation by which the social processes were on the move

Rituals based upon fertility magic must have played a very significant part in the agricultural societies "The fertility of the soil retained its immemorial association with the women who had been the tillers of the earth and were regarded as the depositaries of agricultural magic"[1] The following beliefs are universal Women cause the fruits to multiply because they know how to produce children Whatever is shown or planted by a pregnant woman will grow and increase as the foetus in her womb A sterile woman is injurious to the garden, a barren woman makes the fields barren Thus "the identification of earth with woman pervades the thought of all stages of culture and pages could be filled with the illustrations

1 R. Briffault, *The Mothers*, London 1952, Vol. III, p 117

of the universal equation "[2] Numerous such examples can also be furnished from ancient Indian literature The word *Kṣetra* (seed-field) applies to woman in all the cases In the law book of Manu (IX 33) man is identified with seed and woman with seed-field *Kṣetrabhūtā smrtā nārī pumn ahha ātsmṛ vījabhūt*

Behind the universal conception of the fruit bearing Mother Earth as the *Great Goddess* how the ancient beliefs relating to proceation and fertility worked out, we propose to deal with in the present chapter with the help of a few surviving or now-obsolete rituals

## 2. A Sculpture from Nagarjunikonda

From Nagarjunikonda has been found a piece of sculpture which depicts the lower portion of a female figure in a sitting posture with legs doubled up and wide apart and feet pointing outwards The bifurcated lower portion of the *vulva* is very prominently indicated, while the area between the broad belt below the navel and the upper portion of the vulva is used to make a *Purnaghata* (vessel) highly decorated with an ornamental belt around it [3] In other words it depicts the lower portion of a nude pregnant woman and the elevation of the womb is represented by the *ghaṭa* or jar

In the *Śatapatha Brahmana*,[4] *Ghata* or *Kumbha* is equated with the womb of the Mother Goddess, if not with the Mother Goddess herself The *Kathasaritsagara*[5] identifies *kumbha* and *ghata* explicitly with uterus "The equivalence may explain why the *Navarātra*, nine night' fertility festivals to all Mother Goddesses begins on the first Aśvina by establishing a fertility jar (*Ghaṭasthapana*) [6]

The *kumbha* or jar as representation of Mother Goddess still survives in many festivals In different parts of the country the rite of infusing by means of spells (*mantra*) the spirit of the goddess into an earthen jar is performed A place within the temple is purified by plastering the surface with mud and cowdung The jar is filled with water and covered with the shoots of the mango

2 *ibid.*, p 56 f
3 *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol XXIX, pp 138-39
4 XIII 8 3 3
5 LXX 112
6 D D Kosambi, *Myth and Reality*, Bombay 1961, p 73

tree, and over it is placed an earthen saucer containing barley and rice, which is covered with a yellow cloth The priest recites verses, and sprinkling water on the jar and its contents with a few blades of sacred *Kuśa* grass, he invites the goddess to enter it As a sign that she has occupied it, the outside of the jar is sprinkled with red powder During the period occupied in the rite the priest practises abstinence, eating only roots and fruits The service concludes with a fire-sacrifice in which barley, sugar, butter and sesamum are burnt before the jar which holds the goddess [7]

The most popular Mother Goddess of Bengal is Durgā, whose worship consists of the rituals of *Navapatrikā* or nine plants—*rambha, kaccvī, haridrā, jayantī, bilva, dādima, asoka, mānaka* and *dhanya*—which reveal her association as earth and corn mother with the vegetative forces of nature In one such ritual, a *Yantra* called *Sarvatobhadramandala* is drawn upon the ground It is simply a Tantric diagram showing the pictures of the female generative organ Then a *purnaghata* or *pūrnakumbha* is to be placed on the said diagram The *Pūrnaghata* is an earthen vessel filled with water It is nothing but a symbol of the female womb The figure of a baby called *Sinduraputtalī* is drawn on the surface of the vessel The open mouth of the *pūrnaghata* is covered with five kinds of leaves, and a cocoanut, smeared with vermilion, is placed on it It is a simple fertility rite by which the plants are brought into contact with the female reproductive organ, evidently to ensure multiplication [8]

## 3. Linga and Yoni

Thus in primitive magico-religious rites the importance of human generative organs was a significant feature Briffault provides us with numerous examples in which the exposure and worship of the generative organs form an important feature of the religious rites all over the world [9] Pausanias observes that at Cylbene "the image of Hermes which the people of the place revere is nothing but the male organ of generation erect on the pedestal" [10] At Syracuse, on the day of Thesmophoria, cakes of sesame and honey representing

7 *North Indian Notes and Queries* IV, p 19 f
8 Chattopadhyaya *Lokāyata*, pp 294 f
9 *The Mothers* Vol. III pp 207 ff
10 J E. Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* Cambridge 1908 p 122

the female organ were offered to Demeter [11] At Roman marriages, the bride was required to sit upon the image of Priapus (Mutunnus), the phallic god [12] Even in the middle ages phallic worship was practised in France and Belgium [13] At Mohenjodaro we come across the models of *linga* and *yoni* which were used probably as life bestowing amulets,[14] while at Harappa a number of conical *liṅgas* representing the male organ, and large undulating rings of stones, thought to symbolise the female principle, have been recorded [15]

The origin of the *yoni* cult of the later Tantras must therefore be sought in the prehistoric ruins of Harappa and Mohenjodaro The Tantric *Śrīcakra* is nothing but the representation of female generative organ [16] Primarily the *liṅga* was the symbol of the act of cultivation while the *yoni* represented Mother Earth This finds support in a statement of Manu *iyam bhūmirhi bhūtānāṃ śāsvatī yonirucyate* [17] One should not forget to recall in this connection that the primitive hoe was designed to resemble the male organ, while the word *lāṅgala* (plough) is closely associated with *linga* [18] Later on, when metaphysical values were attributed to them, the principles of the cult of *linga* and *yoni* came to be interpreted in terms of a dualistic philosophical outlook

## 4. Sacred Prostitution

The sacred prostitution practised in various parts of the ancient world was therefore a custom based upon some objective understanding, a custom quite in accordance with the primitive beliefs in the identical relation of earth and woman Prostitution was an essential feature in the cults of the Goddess Mylitta of Babylon, Venus of Cyprus, Aphrodite of Corinth, Anitis of Armenia and other gods and goddess of Western Asia [19] Every woman was bound, at least once in her life, to offer her body to strangers before the

11 L R Farnell *Cults of the Greek States*, Edinburgh 1896-1909, Vol III p 99
12 O Keifer, *Sexual Life in Ancient Rome*, London 1963 pp 114 ff
13 E S Hartland, *Primitive Paternity*, London 1909, Vol I, p 63
14 J Marshall *Mohenjodaro and the Indus Civilization* London 1931 pls XIII 1 7, XIV 2 4
15 M S Vats *Excavations at Harappa* Delhi 1950 pp 51 53, 55 ff, 140
16 R G Bhandarkar, *Collected Works*, Poona 1936 Vol IV, p 209
17 Manu IX. 37
18 P C Bagchi *Pre-Dravidian and Pre Aryan in India* Calcutta 1929, pp 10, 14
19 For references see my *Indian Mother Goddess*, pp 31 39

personified as a goddess Cybele, the Phrygian Mother of the Gods, was also originally a Corn Mother The union of Cybele and Attis, like that of Aphrodite and Adonis, or Ishtar and Tammuj, was marked by sex festivals The union of Demeter and Zeus was also imitated by men and women in the sex festivals at Eleusis in order to make the fields *wave with yellow corns*

Of the influential gods, worshipped in different countries in Western Asia and Egypt with a variety of rituals including sacred prostitution, special mention should be made of Adonis (Tammuj), Attis and Osiris They were the sons (sometimes also conceived as brothers) and lovers respectively of the goddesses Aphrodite (Ishtar), Cybele and Isis According to the existing myths these gods would die every year, causing the goddesses to mourn, and would then be brought back to life once again We have seen that the said goddesses were the personifications of the green corn fields, the Mother Earth The said gods likewise were the personifications of corns, the sons and mortal consorts of the goddess, and the theme of their annual death and revival symbolised the annual facts of plant life in relation to the field In the first chapter we have seen how the killing of the king or priest (impersonating the dying gods) was originally nothing but an incident in the ritual cycle of the queen (impersonating the goddess) It is ritual that generates and sustains myth

## 6 An Indian Cult of the Prostitutes

It is against this background that we are now going to introduce the readers with the rituals of an Indian god of the Adonis type This god is Kartikeya, a well known deity whose legends are found in the epics and the Puranas The worship of Kartikeya is a living feature of modern Hinduism in different parts of India There are a few works on this god dealing with his characteristics as found in ancient literature and inscriptions, his iconographical peculiarities and sacred places associated with his name Only two features of the Puranic Kartikeya which should be remembered in this connection are that he was brought up by the Divine Mothers and that he came out piercing the body of another semi divine being called Skanda with whom he came to be identified later

But here I am describing a local form of his cult which has nothing to do with his traditional mode of worship At Chinsurah in the

Hooghly District of West Bengal, about 40 KM to the north of Calcutta, where I live and where I was born and brought up, this god, i e Kārtikeya, is worshipped specially by the prostitutes Of course it is now a dying cult In my early years I saw many images worshipped by different groups and now there is only one Even this one, although still worshipped by the prostitutes, bears no speciality Other images of this god are also worshipped at Chinsurah in different localities by collecting subscriptions from the peoples These public-worships have nothing to do so far as the present study is concerned

What I remember and what I have gathered from the old persons of this place regarding the Kārtikeya of the prostitutes are the following The image of the god, though he is seated on the peacock, looks more like an amorous gentleman of the nineteenth century than a god with his usual emblems This figure is popularly known as *Bābu kārtik*, the prefix *bābu* being indicative of the usual epithet of the occasional consorts of the prostitutes But this has very little to do with the original cult of the god Of the rituals connected with his worship, two deserve special mention which are still remembered by many of us One was the dance of the eunuchs and the other was the digging of a trench in which rice, pulses, barley and various seeds were sown and allowed to sprout The dance of eunuchs reminds us of the ancient cult of Attis, the god who was emasculated and in whose worship the eunuchs had a significant part to play *It is to be remembered in this connection that in Bengal if not in the whole of India, the eunuchs earn their livelihood by dancing in such houses where a baby has recently been born and that their presence and blessings are considered auspicious to the new born, pointing to their ritual connection with childbirth*

The other ritual may be called the ritual of the *Garden of Adonis*. This is done by digging a trench on the earth or by sowing seeds in an earthen pot Numerous examples of such rituals of the *Garden of Adonis* have been collected by Frazer,[23] and in the next section we shall furnish a few Indian examples The ritual use of the *Garden of Adonis* in the cult of Kārtikeya at Chinsurah and his association with the eunuchs suggest that he was primarily a god of vegetation and fertility His association with pregnancy and childbirth is also indicated by the fact that the Puranic tradition

23 *ibid*, p 194 ff

makes him the husband of Sasthī, the protectress of children

In different parts of East Bengal we have Kārtikeya *Vratas* (rituals) performed by married women for the purpose of offspring and vegetation, and in these rituals *Gardens of Adonis* are cultivated in earthen pots Sometimes an image of Kārtikeya is placed in the centre of a small paddy-field specially made for this purpose, and the area is surrounded in a circular fashion by smaller images of the said god The performers of this *Vrata* have to hear a legend, which is a Puranic story that runs as follows A Brāhmana couple in their sorrowful state of mind for not having any issue of their own, gave up their social life and began to live in a forest One day they came across a number of women in that forest performing a rite which appeared to the Brāhmana as strange Asked by him, they answered that they were performing the ritual of Kārtikeya by sowing seeds in earthen pots They also assured him that if his wife would perform the same rite with them, she must bear good children Accordingly the Brāhmana's wife performed the ritual and in return she gave birth to nice children

Thus Kārtikeya is a god of fertility, both natural and human, and we find that, on the one hand, he is worshipped by the housewives desirous of good offsprings, while on the other, by a special class of women, the purpose of which we do not know, not even they One of my informants who is now a woman of eighty and once who had the occupation of prostitution, told me that the purpose was to get customers like Kārtikeya, a nice, healthy and wealthy person and at the same time licentious I do not know why, when and how the god Kārtikeya came to be conceived as a class one debauch, but there are some references in the *Brahma Purāna* which show that such a tendency to characterise him in this way began to develop as early as the tenth century A D It is also to be remembered that in popular belief Kārtikeya is supposed to be unmarried and the epithet *Āibudo*, i e unmarried, is attributed to him The consort of the Kārtikeya of Chinsurah is Sarasvatī who was also worshipped especially by the prostitutes, not because she is the goddess of learning but because, in popular belief, though not in actual condition, she is unmarried and of doubtful moral character To me, however, it appears that Sarasvatī is traditionally associated with the courtesans for her being the presiding deity of the sixty four arts which the learned courtesans should master according to the *Kāmasūtra* of Vātsyāyana which also describes the public worship of this goddess by the

wealthy Nāgarakas with vocal, musical and dramatic performances In any case, it is interesting to note that in some South Indian sculptures the goddess is represented as seated on a peacock which is the vehicle of Kārtikeya

But my informant s professional interpretation cannot explain the association of Kārtikeya with such primitive rituals as the dance of the eunuchs or making of the *Garden of Adonis* It therefore appears that a very primitive god of vegetation and fertility, whose cult was an offshoot of primitive Mother Goddess cult, was later symbolised by Kārtikeya and that the original worship of this primitive deity was marked by *indiscriminate sexual acts* But in course of time, with the gradual development of patriarchal values, when the concept of female chastity for the purpose of inheritance of property became the driving force of society, the task of performing and maintaining the ancient sexual rites fell on a special class of women, the prostitutes, who were the natural production of the demoralised, patriarchal, property-oriented social system In the initial stage of this later development, they had some prestige and social position, owing to their traditional association with religious cults and arts, which can be proved by ancient literary references, but this also declined in course of time, and they lost even their hold on religious affairs A few rituals, however, survived among them, but these were purely insignificant mechanical survivals, completely meaningless to them [24] An isolated relic of such survivals is the Kārtikeya of Chinsurah

An interesting feature of the Kārtikeya cult is that it follows the solar calendar, while other cults of India mostly follow the lunar It is performed on the last day of the month of Kārtika Two other rituals are known to follow the solar calendar One is the ritual of *Ambuvācī* which is observed by the Bengalee women from the 7th to 11th day of the month of Āsadha (the third month of the Hindu year) It is a fertility rite In Bengal, it is believed that, during the four days of the said ritual, Mother Earth menstruates in order to prepare herself for her fertilising work During this period there is an entire cessation of all ploughing, sowing and other farm work Widows have to undergo a number of taboos since procreation is forbidden to them The second ritual which follows the solar calandar is that of *Itu* performed exclusively by Bengalee women on

24 See my *History of Indian Erotic Literature*, Ch 12

*every sunday of the eighth month known as* Mārgasirsa or Agrahāyana She seems to be a goddess since the epithets *Lakshmī, Thakurani*, etc are attributed to her The most striking feature of the ritual of Itu is the *Garden of Adonis* In an earthen pot various seeds are sown and tended for a month, and this is the symbol of the goddess Four small vessels (*ghatas*) filled with water which represent the female womb are placed on the pot On each sunday a ceremonial fast is observed by women, and on the last sunday the *Gardens of Adonis* are carried to a river or tank by the women and thrown into the water Since the rituals of Ambuvaci, Kartikeya and Itu are all concerned with vegetation, fertility and childbirth and since all of them strictly follow a solar calendar, can we not suppose that they are inter connected revealing a very primitive ritual cycle constituted by them?

## 7. The Gardens of Adonis

We have seen that the rituals of Kartikeya and Itu are characterised by the *Garden of Adonis* by which we understand the sowing of different corn seeds on earth or earthen pots This ritual is not an isolated feature In different parts of Rajasthan Gauri is worshipped as the goddess of vegetation and fertility The meaning of Gauri is 'yellow', *emblematic of the ripened harvest when the votaries of* the goddess adore her effigies which are those of a matron painted the colour of ripe corn An image of the goddess and a smaller one of her husband are placed together A small trench is then dug and barley is sown in it The women dance round it, hand in hand, invoking the blessing of the goddess The young corns are taken up from the *Garden of Adonis* and distributed by the women to the men, who wear them in their turbans [25]

In these rites the distribution of the barley shoots to the men point clearly to the desire for offspring along with the rapid growth of vegetation The same motive probably explains the use of the *Gardens of Adonis in the marriage rituals In Madras, seeds of five or* nine sorts are mixed and sown in earthen pots, the bride and bridegroom water the seeds for four days and on the fifth day the seedlings are thrown into a tank or river [26] In the Himalayan

25 J Tod *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* (ed W Crooke) London 1920 I pp 570 ff

26 *Indian Antiquary*, XXV, p 144

districts of North Western India the cultivators sow barley, maize, pulse or mustard in a basket of earth on the 24th day of the fourth month of Hindu calendar and on the last day of the month they place the new sprouts among small clay images of Siva and Parvati and worship them Next they cut down the green stalks and wear them in their head-dress [27] At the temple of Padmavati, near Pandharpur in Maharashtra during the *Navaratra* a *Garden of Adonis* is cultivated in front of the pedestal of the goddess [28] A similar rite is observed before the images of two other goddesses, Ambabai and Lakhubāi, who also have temples in the same region [29]

In many parts of Northern India we have a festival, the *Javi* or *Jawara* of Upper India, and the *Bhujaria* of Madhya Pradesh in which, on the seventh day of the bright half of *Śravana,* grains of barley are sown in a pot of manure and on the first day of the next month the women and girls take the yellowish green stalks out and distribute the plants to their male friends who bind them in their turbans [30] At Sargal this ceremony is observed about the middle of September On the last day of the function the women of every family bring their own pots and having laid them on the ground they dance around them Then taking the pots of sprouting corn they descend to the edge of the water, wash the soil away from the pots and distribute the young plants among their friends [31]

The Garo priest, at sowing time invokes Rohimi or Rokeme the goddess of vegetation [32] In Western India various kinds of grain are worshipped in honour of the Mother Goddess and the mother is invoked to enter the seedlings which are worshipped and finally thrown into water [33] In Uttar Pradesh, on one of the *Navarātra* days sacred to Devi Durga, special agricultural rites are performed [34] Among the Oraons, it is believed that the Corn Mother watches over the threshing floor until the next

27 E. T Atkinson *Himalayan Districts of the North Western Provinces of India* Allahabad 1884 Vol II p 870
28 *Bombay Gazetteer* Vol XX p 454
29 ibid pp 443 460
30 W Crooke *Popular Religion and Folklore in North India* Westminster 1896 p 294
31 Murray Aunsley in *Folklore* Vol V pp 253 ff
32 A. Playfair *The Garos* London 1909 p. 93
33 *Bombay Gazetteer*, Vol IX(1) p. 392
34 B. A. Gupte *Hindu Holidays and Ceremonials* pp 181 ff

harvest[35] Among them and also among the Mundas, *Gardens of Adonis* are specially cultivated by women in the sowing season[36] The Bhuiyas, Kols and Binds of Uttar Pradesh also worship Hariāri Devi, Mother of Greenery, during the rainy season in a similar way[37] In Kashmir and Punjab, during the *Navrātra*, plants of barley and wheat are placed in an earthen pot and offered to the Mother Goddess

In Bengal the Goddess Laksmi is symbolised by a certain quantity of rice kept in a basket, and on the basket over the heap of rice a wooden pot, popularly known as *Gāchkautā* on tree case, is placed It is shaped like a womb and smeared with vermilion The basket itself is decorated by cowrie shells, the universal symbol of female generative organ On the appointed days the pot is installed on a wooden throne or platform by the oldest lady of the house The said ritual is performed four times in a year in connection with sowing and reaping On the full moon day, immediately after the worship of the goddess Durgā, the ritual of Kojāgari Laksmi takes place According to popular belief, the goddess comes at night and knocks at the door of every house Probably this Laksmi is an offshoot of the goddess Durgā and in the capacity of a Corn Mother her relationship with the latter resembles that of Persephone with Demeter On the last day of the month of Kārtika we have the ritual of Muth-Laksmi in which a few stalks of rice are carried from the field to the house One should not fail to note in this connection that the vegetation god Kārtikeya is also worshipped on that very day In the next month the same stalks are worshipped in connection with Navanna Laksmi or the Laksmi of New Rice

## 8. Sitā and Persephone

The myth of Demeter is very significant to the study of the original character of the Mother Goddess One day while Persephone, daughter of Demeter, was wandering, the earth opened suddenly, and Pluto, god of Hades, forcibly carried her off When Demeter heard that Pluto had carried off her daughter with the consent of Zeus, she withdrew herself from Olympus and also cast a blight

35 S C Roy *Oraons of Chotanagpur*, Ranchi 1915 pp 441 ff
36 Dalton *op cit* p 259
37 W Crooke *Tribes and Castes of the North Western Provinces and Oudh*, Calcutta 1896, Vol I, p 83

is too striking to be ignored The heroine of the epic is born of a field furrow, abducted by a Pluto (Rāvana of Lankā), and after all her adventures she returns to the earth The story of the quest of Sītā by Rāma and his troops reminds us of Demeter's quest for Persephone or the quest of Isis for the body of Osiris In the ancient hymns of the Vedas Sītā is simply the furrow which bears crops for men [41] The word *Rāma* is derived from root *ram* which means ploughing as well as the act of sexual intercourse In the *Arthaśāstra* of Kautilya (I 24), Sītā is conceived as residing in seeds and plants, the superintendent of agriculture is mentioned as *Sītādhyakṣa* The *Harivamśa* (Visnu, III 14) also identifies Sītā with fields for ploughmen Hence it appears that in hoary antiquity the myths of Sītā evolved out of agricultural rituals and that one such myth was rendered into the form of an epic by the great poet Vālmīki

## 9. Earth Goddess of Harappa Culture

In a passage of the *Mārkandeya Pūrana* the Devī says "Next O Ye gods, I shall support the whole world with the life sustaining vegetables which shall grow out of my own body during a period of heavy rain I shall gain fame on earth then as Sākambharī "[42] Thus this goddess is no other than Mother Earth from whose body grow the life sustaining vegetables In this connection we may refer to a seal unearthed at Harappa which, on the obverse, shows a nude female figure, head downwards and legs stretched out upwards, with a plant issuing out of her womb [43] This may be regarded as a primitive prototype of the aforesaid Earth Mother Sakambhari There are many other seals in which trees and plants are associated with the goddess [44] Many of the Mother Goddess figurines from Mohenjodaro are painted with red slip or wash, the significance of which we have discussed above The goddesses wear a distinctive head dress which rises from the back of the head, in some cases directly from the head, while in others it forms part of the coiffure They are significantly nude save for a very short skirt round the

41 *Ṛgveda* IV 57, *Atharvaveda*, III 17 4, *Yajurveda* XII 69 72, *Gobhila Gṛ Sū*, IV 4 27 30, *Pāraskara Gṛ Sū*, II 17 9 10, etc.

42 XCII 43 f (Pargiter's tr )

43 J Marshall *Mohenjodaro and the Indus Civilization*, London 1931, Vol I, p 52

44 *ibid*, 63 ff, Mackay, *Further Excavations at Mohenjodaro*, Vol I, pp 337-38

waist secured by a girdle[45] Terracotta figurines from Southern Sind along the Indus are similar to those found at Harappa and Mohenjodaro[46] The figurines of the Mother Goddess from Chanhudaro are also of Mohenjodaro type, the only difference being that they stand upon a flat, more or less open, base which recall the figurines from the pre-Harappan sites of Northern and Southern Baluchistan The figurines of the Kulli culture finish at the waist in a splayed pedestal, arms bent with hands on the hips, breasts usually shown, eyes fashioned from small stones, hair elaborately dressed, ornamented by oval pendants resembling cowrie-shells, and bangles on arms and wrists In the Zhob valley sites the same type of female figures recurs with necklaces, large and beak-like noses, and slit mouths and bangles Stuart Piggott rightly observes that they are "a grim embodiment of the Mother Goddess who is also the guardian of the dead—an underworld deity connected alike with the corpse and seed-corn buried beneath the earth The fertility aspect so often connected with such underworld gods is indeed represented by other models"[47]

## 10. Earth and Woman

We shall conclude this chapter with reference to an interesting ritual connected with earth and woman Frazer referred to a curious custom of rain-making which prevailed in different parts of Europe When people suffered from drought, rain was invoked by a number of women who stripped themselves naked Referring to this custom he remarked that "such attempts are by no means confined, as the cultivated reader might imagine to the naked inhabitants of those sultry lands like Central Australia and some parts of Eastern or Southern Africa where for months together the pitiless sun beats down out of a blue and cloudless sky on the parched and gapping earth They are, or used to be, common enough among outwardly civilised folk in the moist climate of Europe"[48]

The motive behind this curious rite may easily be explained in terms of imitative magic Earth requires seed in the form of water, just as a woman requires seed or semen to produce a child During

45 Marshall, *op cit*, p 341, Mackay, *op cit*, p 349
46 N G Majumdar, *Exploration in Sind* (MASI, 48), Delhi 1934, pp 38, 68
47 S Piggott, *Prehistoric India*, p 127
48 *The Golden Bough* (ab), pp. 62 78

the Gorakhpur famine of 1873-78, there were many accounts of women stripping themselves naked at night and dragging the plough over the fields [49] Of regular nudity rites in case of the failure of rains we have an instance from Chunar "The rains of this year held off for a long period and last night (24th July 1892) the following ceremony was performed secretly Between the hours of 9 and 10 P M a barber's wife went from door to door and invited all the women to join in ploughing They all collected in a field from which all males were excluded Three women of a cultivator's family stripped off all their cloths, two were yoked to a plough like oxen, and the third held the handle Then they began to imitate the operation of ploughing The woman who had the plough in her hand shouted, 'O Mother Earth Bring parched grain, water and chaff Our bellies are bursting to pieces from hunger and thirst'"[50]

The same rite was performed in a village near Lucknow on the 30th of July 1963, and the news appeared in the newspapers with funny journalistic notes and comments However, what we find in this case is that it is a simple rite of rain magic in which Mother Earth is associated with woman Probably the curious marriage rite called *Matamangara* of North India is based upon the said idea of communicating the fertility of the earth to the bride [51] In the Telugu country, five women are sent to the clay pit to bring the earth for the seats of the bride and bridegroom [52] The first act done when a child is born among the Nayars is to beat the earth with a cocoanut leaf and in the puberty rites of the Parayans the mother strikes the ground behind the child with a flail [53] The Oraon girls, during the time of sowing, pat the earth to render her fertile [54]

It appears from what we have seen above that the Earth Mothers came into being when people began to settle down in agricultural communities The connection between the growth of agriculture and the origin of the village communities may account for the emergence of Earth and Corn Mothers on the basis of the identical nature of earth and woman All over the world, the earth spirit

49 Crooke *op cit* p 69, see also *Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute* Vol XIX, pp. 231 ff.
50 *North Indian Notes and Queries* Vol I p 210
51 Crooke *Religion and Folklore of North India* p 51
52 J E. Padfield *The Hindu at Home*, Madras 1896 p 144
53 Thurston *op cit.*, V, p 344 VI, p 93
54 S C. Roy *op cit*, p. 14?

is generally regarded as female and the presiding deities of agriculture are mainly goddesses, because the idea of fertility and reproduction is concerned with woman. The fact that agriculture among primitive races was the business of women rather than of men probably meant that the goddesses were at first worshipped by women rather than by men.

the very telling fixes the outline of the personality"[2] The rites of the annual decay and revival of plant life, current in olden days, as we have seen in a preceding chapter, undoubtedly gave rise to the myths of Osiris and Isis in Egypt, Attis and Cybele in Phrygia, Tammuj and Ishtar in Syria and Babylon, and Adonis and Aphrodite in Cyprus and Greece Herein one has to seek the root of the Christian concept of resurrection The story of the death and resurrection of Christ was probably based upon the myths of the death and revival of Adonis, Attis and Osiris[3] This does not, however mean that Christ was a mythical figure It is everywhere a common practice to ascribe mythical elements to historical personalities Here we may refer to the Buddha legends which have thoroughly converted a historical personality into a divine figure

That the festivals of Holi and Dewali (Dipavali), celebrated now a days in different parts of India with so much pomp and splendour, were originally the rituals of death and resurrection, may appear strange and even fanciful, but there are indeed grounds to believe that they were so However, before dealing with the essentials of these festivals, it is necessary to introduce our readers with some allied facts and concepts which are expected to serve as keys to our understanding

## 2 The Cult of the Dead among the Buddhists

The ancient Buddhist monuments may be divided into five groups according to their object Stambha, Stūpa, Caitva, Vihara and Sucaka[4] Of these, the Viharas were monasteries for the accommodation of monks living together in communities, and were mostly, *if not always,* connected with Caityas The Sucakas were ornamental rails mostly employed as the enclosures of Stūpas, or to surround a terrace on which stood a sacred tree, etc The Stambhas were pillars on the capital of which a religious symbol is represented[5] Some scholars believe that the conception of Stambha derived its main impulses from the ancient phallic cult It is a development of the primitive custom of erecting a monolith as a symbol

2 J E Harrison *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* Cambridge 1908 pp 64 187 304
3 J G Frazer *Adonis Attis Osiris* pp 182 93 219-34 269 77
4 Cf J Fergusson *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture* London 1876 p 50
5 A Grünwedel *Buddhist Art in India* London 1901 pp 20-21

of human generative organ (cf the erection of *dhvaja* mentioned in the third chapter) on a buried dead body as a symbol of regeneration This is quite likely

The term Stupa applies to any mound, as a *funeral pile* or tumulus, and hence to domical structures over sacred relics of Buddha and other Buddhist saints "When they preserved relics, the shrine in which these were kept was the *Dhatugarbha* (Pali, *Dhātugabbha*, Singhalese *Dāgaba*, Japanese *To*), and as most Stūpas were erected over relics (*dhātu*), the whole structure a Dagaba (*Dhātugarbha*) A Stūpa consists of a circular or square base supporting a dome (*garbha*), on which stands a square block or neck (*gala*) representing a box to hold a relic, crowned by a capital consisting a number of flat tiles Above this is the umbrella or spire (*Cūdāmani*—Burmese, *hti*)—single or with several roofs, usually three, over one another Like Stūpa, the word Caitya is applied to a monument or *cenotaph*, and in a secondary sense to a temple or shrine containing a *caitya* or *Dhātugarbha* (In Nepal and Tibet the word *Caitya* is used in the same sense of *Stūpa*)[6] Caityas or Dagabas are an essential feature of temples or chapels constructed for purposes of worship, there being a passage round the Caitya for circumambulation (*Pradakṣiṇāya*) and from these such temples have received their appellation. The name of Caitya, however, applies not only to sanctuaries, but to sacred trees, holy spots or other religious monuments"[7]

In fact, the *Stūpas*, having the character of sacred monuments are known as the *Caityas*, and the Caitya hall is really a shrine in which the votive *Caitya* or Stupa occupies the place of the altar The word *Caitya* came from *citā* or funeral pyre Likewise the *Stūpa* with its hemispherical structure certainly emerged out of the earthen funeral mounds It is likely that originally on the earthen funeral mound a tree was planted and the area was enclosed by fence made of bamboo or wood, which was later replaced by ornamental rails The custom of rearing *Stūpas* was pre Buddhist. The Buddha himself asked Ānanda to erect *Stūpas* over the remains of his body in the traditional way[8] These funeral mounds were associated with primitive religious beliefs and practices, and in course of time they acquired a special Buddhistic affiliation as containing the relic of the Master or his chief disciples

6. J Burgess *Buddhist Cave Temples and their Inscriptions* London 1883 p. 114
7 Grünwedel *op cit.*, pp. 20-21
8. *Digha Nikaya*, XVI 5. 11, *Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. XI, p. 93

## 3. The Pīr Cult

In North India, specially in Bengal and Bihar, among different sections of the Muslim community, there is the cult of Pir, one of the interesting features of which is the worship of tombs These tombs of the Pirs are generally covered with a piece of red cloth, and offerings are made to them These Pirs are regarded as holy persons or saints Their contributions to the cause of religion and their supposed superhuman deeds raised them to the standard of divinities Besides the celebrated Pirs of the olden days, there are even living Pirs, and even Pir-dynasties One who is born in such a dynasty is entitled to get the honour of a living Pir

The followers of this Pir tradition do not adhere strictly to all the rules prescribed by official Islam They have their own esoteric rituals and they base these rituals on their *own* interpretations of the sacred texts *As we have stated above, one of the most important* features of this Pir cult is the worship of the tombs The Pir on whose memory the tomb is erected, or the one who is buried therein, is believed to grant his worshipper his desired objects by virtue of his superhuman power The worshippers of these tombs are not exclusively Muslims The Hindus also worship these tombs with equal sincerity and devotion

Now the question is Who were these Pirs? Among whom this special cult first developed? By itself the Pir cult shows that it contains various beliefs and practices which were locally adopted One thing which must not escape the notice of any observer is that the majority of the surviving tombs of the Pirs look exactly like the Buddhist *Stupa*, the same domical structure, big or small, the same ornamental rails, and even the same umbrella In fact a few of them were really Buddhist *Stūpas*, later converted into the shrines of Pirs Small clay figures of horse are usually offered as votive articles to these tombs or *Stupas* In every shrine of the Pirs there is a wish-fulfilling tree (*Kalpavṛkṣa*), and if any one desires to have anything he should tie a brick bat on any branch of the tree The brick bat is a substitute for *fruit*, since he wants to have his desire *fruitful*—a simple instance of imitative magic As a rule, at every evening candles are to be lighted around the tomb of the Pir which reminds us of the Buddhist custom of lamp offering around the *Stūpas* This point will be stressed in our analysis of the festival of Dipavali

There is reason to believe that in Bengal and Bihar the earlier

onverts into Islam were the Buddhists Despite their conversion hey did not give up their old religious practices like the cult of the lead saints in the forms of *Stūpa* worship and others, and this accounts or the emergence of the cult of Pirs "A good many Buddhists appear to have been at least nominally converted to Islam after the establishment of Turki-Muslim rule in Bengal But Bengali Buddhists (and Hindus) who adopted Islam did not and could not adapt their mental make up to the atmosphere of Arabic or Irani or Turki Islam Saint-worship through their tombs (contemptuously described by the more orthodox or puritanical Bengali Mussalmans as *Pir Pirasti* or *Gor-Pirasti* 'worship of saints', 'worship of tombs'), an Islamised verson of the Buddhist worship of *Stūpas* or *Caityas* built over the ashes or relics of great teachers and saints, forms an important cult in the Islam of Bengal and India and it can legitimately be looked upon as an inheritance, Islamised no doubt, from Buddhistic ritual and practice "[9]

In Bengal, the Muslims are often contemptuously called *neḍe* which might indicate their early Buddhist affiliation The word *neḍā* means one whose head is clean shaven, a practice which was a must for every Buddhist monk The Vaiṣṇavas of Bengal were also contemptuously known as *neḍā* and *neḍī* since they had adopted some of the Buddhist practices like shaving the head, the use of yellow garb and begging bowl, etc. More interesting is to note that the wooden begging bowls, which are used even today by the Muslim *Phakirs* and which they fix on the back of their shoulder, are exactly the same as were used by the Buddhist monks and are still used by them in the Buddhist countries What is more thrilling is that the term *Pir* is same as the Buddhist term *Sthavira* or *Thera* In Persian *Pir* means an 'old man', 'a venerable one', just as *Sthavira* in Sanskrit or *Thera* in Pali means an 'old man', 'a venerable one'

## 4 The Mathas

In Bengal during the festival of Holi, which has now become a part of the Dolayātrā festival of Lord Kṛṣṇa, a special type of sweetmeat is offered to the god This is known as *Maṭha*, a preparation of sugar or molasses It looks like a straight-edged pyramid, height being greater than the base Often it looks like a church steeple

9 S. K. Chatterji in B. C. Law Volume, Vol. I, Calcutta 1945, p. 81

or the common European type of cenotaph, base square or circular and the steeple elongated and conical Recently, however, there is a tendency to change its traditional form It is interesting to note that this special type of sweetmeat is used only in connection with the rituals of Holi or Dolayātrā and on no other occasion except in the case of certain East Bengal village cults of Kārtikeya This is a fact which evokes our interest

The word *Matha* is very suggestive It denotes a monastery or a shrine Side by side the word also implies a *structure,* usually straight edged pyramidal, *erected on a place where a dead body has been burnt* Such *Mathas* erected on the place of burning the corpse are numerous in different parts of Bengal Specially these are erected on the ashes of reputed persons May not be the same, but a similar custom is expected to prevail in other parts of India However, what interests us greatly is that the sweetmeat called *Matha,* served as offering to the god during the festival of Holi, is really an imitative miniature form of the *Matha* which is erected on the place of burning the corpse

## 5 The Miming of Burning the Dead

Since the festival of Holi is celebrated in all the states of India with local customs and rituals, it is difficult to have a first hand knowledge of them Therefore I am laying greater stress on the local customs of Bengal, with which I am acquainted, with a request to my Indian readers to compare them with those prevailing in their own states and districts I think that the similarities will be greater than the differences

In Bengal, at the evening before the day of Holi, a special rite is performed It is the miming of the act of burning a deadbody A human figure is made of different articles and then it is burnt in the same way as a deadbody is generally burnt This ceremony is variously called *Nedāpodā, Cāncor* and so on, in different places In the western districts of Bengal it is called *Medāpodā* the first part of the word being regarded as the corruption of Menta, an Asura whose supposed body made of different combustible articles serves as the object of burning A similar custom also prevails in Bihar and parts of Uttar Pradesh, which is known as *Holika dahan* and *Sammat jvalan* The word *nedāpoda* or *medāpodā* may be a corruption of *madāpodā* (burning a deadbody),

that the palaeolithic peoples knew, it was an attempt to make the body again serviceable for its owner's use"[16] "The symbolism becomes quite clear when we find, as we commonly do, that the skeleton has been laid in the contracted or uterine posture Smeared with the colour of life, curled up like a babe in the womb—what more could the primitive man do to ensure that the soul of the departed would be born again?"[17]

## 7. The Original Form of Holi

The present form of the Holi festival therefore contains the relics of some primitive rituals connected with the concepts of fertility, death and renewal of life The evidences by themselves are fragmentary and regional in nature Despite these shortcomings a faint picture of its original form comes within the range of our vision, and in that form it was evidently a primitive rite of death and resurrection, a funeral rite, the purpose of which was to secure a new life for the departed one Gradually this rite developed a wider significance and impersonal character, symbolising the events of the deaths and renovations in nature The death of the year in winter and its revival in spring with the growth of new leaves on the trees probably served as the basis for the later conceptions culminated in the present form of this festival In fact, everywhere in the world the natural year begins with the spring Even the English calendar shows that the months of September, October, November and December were respectively the seventh, eighth, ninth and tenth months of the year January and February being respectively the eleventh and twelfth months, the year was really to begin from March which is the time of spring Indian year also begins with spring, and from this point of view it may not be unreasonable to hold that the festival of Holi, even in its present form, symbolises the death of one year and the birth of another

## 8. The Full and New Moon

The festival of Holi is celebrated on the full moon day of spring, while that of Dipāvali or Dewali on the new-moon night at the

16 R A. S Macalister *Textbook of European Archaeology*, Cambridge 1921, Vol I, p. 502
17 G Thomson, *op cit*, p 210

take part in the orgies, be therefore traced to such beliefs in the wonder working erotic power of the moon?

In a preceding chapter we have seen that from the time of the *Rgveda*[25] there was a mystical belief that the moon was the divine guardian of a girl, and according to the *Grhyasamgraha*[26] and the *Paraskara Grhyasūtra*,[27] he enjoys a girl when she develops the signs of puberty In the *Kausitakī Upaniṣad* it is stated that "from the wise moon, who orders the seasons, consisting of fifteen parts when he is born, from the moon who is the abode of our ancestors, the *seed* is derived The *seed*, even myself, the gods gathered up into an active man, and through an active man they brought me to a mother"[28]

In primitive thought the moon is not only regarded as the cause of conception and generation, but also as the regulator of the periodic function of women, the controller of menstruation and the guardian of the embryo and the placenta [29] Among the Chukchis, the magician "when he desires to make especially powerful incantations, must strip himself naked and go out of his house at night when the moon is shining [30] In Ghana the same word means both 'moon' and 'magic' [31] In Ashango, moon is conceived as the source of magical power [32] The Thonga megicians of South Africa in the time of performing their functions are said to have become *Thwaza* or possessed by the moon [33]

Since the moon is specially conceived as the source of magical powers and the cause of conception and generation, it is evident that the ideas of regeneration or rebirth and the rituals connected with them have some logical bearing on the functioning of the moon The conception of rebirth is conspicuously associated with the moon, also because of its eclipses symbolising death and revival That is why during the eclipse men usually follow the traditional customs which are *connected with the event of a man's death in a family* Old utensils are given up which is followed by a ceremonial bath The

25 X. 85 40-41
26 Quoted in the Com. of *Gobhila Gr Su*, III 4 6
27 I 4 16, cf *Samvarta Samhita* 64-67
28 *Sacred Books of the East* Vol I, p 233 f
29 Elliot Smith *The Evolution of the Dragon* p 48
30 Bogorus *The Chukchee*, pp 305, 448
31 Ellis *The Tsi speaking Peoples*, p 19
32 Chailler *Journey to Ashango Land* p. 238
33 Junod, *op cit.*, Vol. II, pp 451, 453

regular course of moon by itself suggests the death and revival theme The periodical death and revival of the moon is responsible for the observance of various local rites throughout India which are mainly characterised by ceremonial bath and fasting

The Hindu religious calendar follows the lunar line according to which dates are fixed for worship and ritual The bright half (*Sukla pakṣa*) is regarded better than the dark half (*Kṛṣna pakṣa*) for such purposes The full noon days are considered suitable for such public festivals or the Rasa yātrā, Jhulana yatra, etc, the cult of the goddess of wealth and fortune, and so on The birth days of the celebrated saints are often conspicuously connected with the full-moon days While the celebrations of the full moon are especially connected with rebirth, a new life, those of the new moon are with death and funeral aspects The night dedicated to the god Siva who with his followers lives in the places of cremation surrounded by ghosts and goblins belongs to the dark half (*Kṛṣna pakṣa*) So is the ritual of Dipavali which is observed on the dark new moon night In Bengal this ceremony is associated with the annual worship of the goddess Kālī who has been always identified with death (*mṛtyurūpā*) In other parts of India, Dewali is observed on the new-moon night independently without any connection with the worship of Kālī which proves that this connection is regional and later This connection is first mentioned in Kaśināthas *Śyāmāsaparyāsavidhi* which was composed in 1768 We are to remember that although Kālī is a very old goddess, her worship became popular in Bengal not before the seventeenth century But Dewali existed even before that evidently as a death festival, and it was probably due to this that in later times with the popularity of the conception of Kālī as the goddess of death, it was connected with her annual worship

## 9. The Fire Festivals of Europe

The main feature of the festival of Dewali, as is known to all, is to light candles. If we seek a similar ritual we can easily find it in the pre-Christian fire festivals of Europe According to the Teutonic mythology, found in the collection called *Edda*, the god Balder, the beautiful, apprehended a danger and he was afraid Having seen him moved, his mother requested all the objects of the world not to do any harm to Balder and they complied with her request But she forgot about mistletoe which she considered

buried under the tomb  The flame of light is the symbol of relation with the dead and the departed soul, and since this connection with death is direct, the relation of Dewali with the world of the ghosts is close  This explains why the preceding night of Dewali is called in Bengal *Bhuta Caturdasī*, the night of the ghosts, which is observed by lighting fourteen candles  On every night after the Dewali, throughout the month of Kartik (October-November), a lamp is to be raised on a pole made of bamboo, a custom which is known as raising the *Ākaśapradīpa* (the sky lamp)

In India Dipāvalī or Dewali is definitely connected with death Its earliest mention is found in Bhadravahu's *Kalpasūtra* which is an ancient sacred text of the Jains  It should be remembered that in India Dewali has a special importance among the Jains  The North Indian pompous celebration of Dewali has derived its main features from the Jains of Gujarat and Rajasthan  Mahavira, the twentyfourth Tirthaṅkara of the Jains passed away on the last day of the month of Āśvina in 468 B C  According to the *Kalpasūtra*, as soon as the news of the death of Mahāvira came to be known, the Mallas and the Vrjis observed the lamp festival in the honour of the departed lord[34]  It was arranged to commemorate the demise of Mahavira, and since then the Jains have been performing this celebration every year on the day of his *nirvāna*  In this case the Jains must have also followed an ancient custom, an ancient faith, according to which there is an intrinsic connection between the dead and the flame of lamp  Since this connection has long been established in human mind, the common custom is that when a man dies and his body is taken to the burning ground, a lamp has to be kept lighted at the place where he breathed his last  Likewise when the image of any god is taken away for immersion, a lamp has to be kept lighted on the altar where the image was installed

In terms of contagious magic if we associate the flame of funeral pyre with that of the lamp, an idea apparently transpires that those places or peoples became sources of inspiration of the Dewali or similar festivals where or among whom had developed the custom of burning the dead  The custom of burning the dead, although ancient, is not universal  The oldest custom of the disposal of dead is perhaps exposure, to keep the body in a secluded place, relics of which are still found among the Iranian followers of Zarathustra

34 *Sacred Books of the East* Vol XXII, p 266

But they also light a candle on the place where the death takes place The second custom is burial and this is also older than burning But candles are also lighted on the tombs Are we then to infer that those peoples among whom the custom of burning did not exist borrowed the idea of lamp offering from those who developed the custom of burning the dead?

I do not think so, although in the case of rituals borrowing is a constant feature Since the discovery and use of fire was the most important event in human history, its influence was keenly felt in all spheres of life, including even the traditional rituals Fire being the helper in every human action, the idea also developed that it was able to lead the dead into the desired region Thus fire got easy access in the funeral rites even among those peoples who did not burn their dead In the Vedic age the customs of burial and burning existed side by side, and hence we are quoting a verse from the *Rgveda* to show precisely what was the role of Agni (fire) in this case "Again, O Agni, to the Fathers send him who, offered in thee, goes with our oblations *Wearing new life* let him increase his offspring let him *rejoin a body*, Jatavedas" (X 16 5) [35]

Therefore, burning or reducing into ashes is not the sole function of Agni He can animate anything by his heat, and as such he can cause rebirth As we have repeatedly said, to the ancients death did not mean end of everything With death was inseparably associated the idea of resurrection The flame of lamp or that of fire is the symbol of this rebirth or resurrection, and that is why its ritual use is found in everything connected with death We have seen that the mystery of plant life is inextricably blended with the primitive concept of rebirth, and if Dewali is a ritual of death and rebirth, it is likely that it should maintain a relation with plant life Is it the reason behind the Bengalee custom of eating fourteen kinds of vegetables on the day before the commencement of the Dewali festival? Perhaps this ritual eating has now become a mechanical affair and many of the accompanying rituals have now sunk into oblivion, but it is not at all difficult to understand that once all these carried a special significance From full-moon to new-moon, birth and death of a period consisting of fourteen days, each symbolised by a kind of plant, the Dipavali on the new moon night which is an embodiment of death, the faint phase of moon on the next night as

35 R. T H Griffith, *Hymns of the Rgveda*, Vol II, Delhi 1963, p 402

the herald of new birth—if these fragments are collocated side by side, can we not visualise a dim and veiled picture of the philosophy of life which our primitive forefathers had acquired through experience, those seemingly fundamental ideas justifiable at the time when they were propounded, but with fuller experience had proved to be inadequate?

# VIII

# HOOK SWINGING

## A Study in the Proletarian Cults and Rituals of Bengal

### 1. Prologue

In parts of Eastern India, especially in Bengal, a few interesting rituals and festivals are performed in the month of *Caitra* (the last month of the Hindu calendar corresponding to the period from the middle of the March to that of April) mainly by the lower strata of the Hindus, those who earn their livelihood by manual labour and also by agriculture, craft and other technical occupations These rituals and festivals which also reveal, along with other features, the professional characteristics of the simpler peoples, are dedicated to a variety of local deities and also to Śiva and, significantly enough, they do not find mention in the Purānas and also in the medieval religious manuals simply because of their connection with the toiling masses, the lower castes who had very little to do with the Smārta Pauranic ideals of Brahmanism There are reasons to believe that these festivals and rituals are continuation of a very primitive tradition which existed side by side with the sophisticated ones of the higher peoples, and despite the professed indifference and even bitter antagonism of the literate class to the beliefs and practices of the toiling masses, their survival and continuation throughout the ages could not be stopped Rather, during the age that marked the decadence of Buddhism and the advent of Islam, some of the cults and rituals of the simpler peoples were adopted by the higher In order to save their skin and property from the hands of the Muslim plunderers, the higher peoples had at least to make a *show* of cultural identity with the lower on whose physical strength they had to depend As a result, there were occasional *proletarian revivals* in the field of religion, as we shall presently see

### 2. The Rituals of Year-Ending

Throughout the month of *Caitra* a sort of religious and ritualistic

movement, marked by the sound of drum beating and the procession of the drummers, can be observed in different parts of the country It is believed that the god Śiva remains unusually heated during these days, and since he requires to be cooled down, men and women are found in the Śiva shrines carrying pots of holy water to be poured upon the phallic form (*linga*) of the god Those who are specially devoted, take the vow of asceticism (*sannyāsa*), wearing ochre robe, eating only once a day by cooking what is got through alms, sleeping on the ground, abstaining from sexual intercourse and observing a number of taboos in relation to different aspects of life This vow of asceticism may also be observed by women, and in fact, female ascetics, clad in ochre robe, are found in large number going side by side with the males, collecting alms and performing rites If they menstruate during this period, the blood is regarded very sacred, and pieces of the cloth that contains the blood are used as amulets against diseases and other physical disabilities The month of *Caitra* is also regarded as that of Siva's marriage with Nilavati who in her previous birth was no other than Sati, the daughter of Daksa who committed suicide at the insult caused by her father to her husband Married women as a rule take part in the rites of *Nīla* which is a part of *Cadaka* rituals The rites of *Nīla*, dedicated to the goddesses Nila, Nilavati, Nilacandika, Nilaparamesvari and often to the male god Niladevata, which are mainly sexual in character vary from place to place In eastern Bengal, throughout the month of Caitra the ritual (*del*) of Pat thakur takes place It is a disguised ritual of female organ The form of the object of this cult is a wooden plank on the right side of which is planted a *trident (trisula)*, and the left side is fashioned in the shape of a female organ All these have now a days been conspicuously associated with Siva but there are reasons to believe that previously other local gods had to do some thing with these rituals The religious elements of the *Cadaka* festival show that they contain the cults of a variety of deities, and also a good number of sectarian features some of which may be traced even to Buddhism The *Gajana* rituals are dedicated not only to Siva, but to Dharma, Nila and other deities as well One of the popular features of all these rituals is the test of endurance, the physical pain that the staunch devotees are to suffer through self torture, some times amounting even to death Lying on the bed of sharp nails, jumping upon open daggers, perforation of the tongue by an iron rod, etc are a few of such horrible features of the *Gajana* festivals

Formerly in the hook-swinging of the *Cadaka*, the iron-hook was to be fixed on the back of the swinger through his muscles This cruel custom had been abolished by the British Government in the nineteenth century

## 3. The Focus of Attention

The focus of our attention in this chapter will not, however, be the particulars of these rituals We are mainly concerned with the *proletarian revivals* which had characterised the social and religious life of eastern India from the twelfth century onwards When Buddhism ceased to exist as Buddhism, many of its elements were absorbed by the existing religions like Śaivism and Vaisnavism Some of its features like the cult of the dead were even absorbed by a group of newly converted Muslims, as we have seen in the preceding chapter But there was an independent group of cults and rituals, a good deal of which have survived to our day as the suppressed religion of the masses, that had played a leading role in the stupendous social and religious transformation which was taking place after the decline of Buddhism and with the advent of Islam The following observation of Prof S K Chatterji[1] on these cults and rituals is worth quoting "The original or national cults of the pre-Aryan peoples are found in the worship of many caste or tribal deities, or village gods, who have no place in the official Hindu pantheon of pan Indian acceptance, at times they have just succeeded in finding place in some Sanskrit Purana, but in other cases they have advanced only as far as the threshold or the ante chamber of the hall of official Hinduism by having their legends rendered in the vernacular only Thus there are village godlings of the type of Gabhur Dalan and Mochrā Singha worshipped in the South Bengal Delta, who are unknown to any Purāna, and unsung even in the vernacular, there are Daksin Rāy and Kalu Gāzi godlings who control the tigers in the Sundarbans of the forest lands of the southern Delta whose exploits are narrated only in Bengali, and whose fame has not yet travelled beyond Bengal, and finally, there are deities of the type of Śitalā, the goddess of small-pox, and Manasā, the goddess of serpents, who have received admission into the pantheon of Puranic gods and goddesses,

1 *B C Law Volume*, 1945, ed D R. Bhandarkar and others p 76

honoured, although they are newcomers, beside Śiva and Devī, Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī The nature of pre Aryan religion and ritual, in its mythology and its ideas and practices, among the various pre-Aryan groups of peoples, it has not been possible to establish as yet most of it now survives in the rites and cults obtaining in remote villages, which are now always under the aegis of official Brahmanical Hinduism" According to Chatterji, these cults and rituals of pre-Aryan origin are obtained among the Dravidian, Austric, Tibeto-Burman and other peoples of Bengal, recent and prehistoric, who formed the original inhabitants of Bengal, upon whom the Upper Gangetic Aryan speech and culture were imposed We are not, however, concerned with the linguistic and racial questions involved in these cults and rituals We shall therefore take them simply as things *proletarian* and try to analyse their features in terms of their functional role in the religious and social life of this country

## 4. Buddhism versus Śaivism

The last two kings of the Buddhist dynasty of the Candras of South East Bengal gave up Buddhist faith, Ladahacandra becoming a Vaisnava and Govindacandra a Śaiva [2] The Pala kings, who ruled Bengal and Bihar from the eighth century onwards, although claimed to have been staunch followers of the Buddhist faith (*Paramasaugata*) were also eager to suppress the social evil styled *Varnasankara* like typically zealous Brahmanical kings [3] Many of the Pala kings even repudiated Buddhism The well known Bhagalpur plates represents Narāyanapāla (854-908 A D) as a devotee of Śiva, recording the king's gift of a village in favour of the temple of Śiva-bhattāraka and the *Pāśupatācārya pariṣad* in a locality called Kalasapota and also referring to his boasts of having built one thousand roomed temple for the said god in the same locality [4] D C Sircar refers to a newly discovered inscription[5] which speaks of a great Saiva religious establishment in North Bengal, the pontiffs of which were Vidyāśiva, his disciple Dharmaśiva, his disciple Indraśiva his disciple, Śarvaśiva and his disciple Mūrtiśiva King Mahipala I (c 990-

2 D C. Sircar *Religious Life in Ancient and Medieval India* Delhi 1971 pp 253-57

3 *Gauḍalekhamālā* (Monghyer Plate of Devapāla v 36) p 36

4 *Indian Antiquary* Vol XV, pp 304 ff.

5 Paper read on 18-2 1974 at the Centre of Advanced Study in Ancient Indian History and Culture, Calcutta University

1040 A D ) is stated to have dedicated a temple to Indrasiva Sarvaśiva is described as the *guru* of Mahīpāla's son Nayapāla (1040 1055 A D ) The inscription also says that in his old age Śarvaśiva retired, having placed Mūrtisiva in the position of the *guru* of the Gauda king

These Saiva teachers belonged to the Mattamayūra sect of Central India The teachers of this sect bore, as a rule, the epithet *Siva* or *Śambhu* at the end of their names That those Sivācāryas of the aforesaid Pala inscription were associated with the Matta mayūras belonging to a region outside Bengal is indicated by the fact that Dharmasiva built a Siva temple at Vārāṇasī while the Paramāra king Bhoja is mentioned in connection with Rūpasiva who was a friend of Mūrtiśiva and caused the latter's *prasasti* to be composed and image to be made and is said to have revived the lost philosophy of the god Śiva So far as the religious practices and rituals of the Mattamayūras are concerned, it has come down to us that there were dances, music, mimicry and physical tortures in honour of Śiva They indeed behaved like intoxicated (*matta*) peacocks (*mayūras*) and many of their rituals were saturated with sexual elements H Goetz even ascribes the sexual bas reliefs of Khajuraho to Mattamayūra inspiration [6]

It was possible for Śaivism to take the lead, to fill up, to a consi derable extent, the vacuum in the field of religion that followed the decline of Buddhism by absorbing numerous cults and rituals of the lower peoples within its fold But in doing so, Śaivism in this part of the country had to change its original character Although Śiva has an ancient and glamorous history, in the folklore of Bengal he is represented as an agriculturist working in the field and at the same time making love with black and healthy women of the lower peoples Officially and non-officially, Śiva was made to preside over numerous popular cults and rituals, as a result of which Śaivism as an *organised* religion rapidly became defunct and survived only as a part of the medieval Śākta religion [7]

6 For the Mattamayūras see *Indian Historical Quarterly* Vol XXV, pp 15 ff J N Banerjea *Paurāṇic and Tāntric Religion* Calcutta 1965 pp. 106-08 V V Mirashi s Intro to *Corp Ins Ind*, Vol IV, R. D Banerji *Haihayas of Tripuri*, MASI XXIII H Goetz in *Arts Asiatiques*, Tome V, 1958 Fasc I pp. 35 ff

7 For this transformation see my *History of the Śākta Religion* New Delhi 1974

## 5. Buddhism and Vaisnavism

While Śaivism was absorbing numerous popular cults and rituals which were previously under the guardianship of Mahāyāna Buddhism, Vaisnavism of Bengal was not lagging behind to absorb within its fold a few significant Buddhist elements The Sena kings of Bengal, who succeeded the Pālas, were although devout Śaiva in their religious conviction, were not reluctant to patronise Vaisnavism From the evidence of the *Gītagovinda* of Jayadeva, which was a production of the Sena court, it is clear that the followers of the Visnu cult in the twelfth century did not hesitate to declare the Buddha as an incarnation (*Avatāra*) of Viṣnu and to introduce Buddhist Sahajayāna ideas in so far as the sexual matters were concerned From the twelfth century onwards until the advent of Srī Caitanya, Vaisnavism was overcharged by sexual elements at the root of which lay the conception of the union of male and female principles symbolised by Kṛsna and Rādhā, previously symbolised in Buddhism by the concepts of Sūnyatā and Karunā, and it is against this background that the significance of Jayadeva's *Gītagovinda* should be understood which emphasises only upon the erotic aspects in the relation between Rādhā and Kṛsna Nāvājidāsa in his *Bhaktamāla* rightly calls it *Kokakāvya navarasa sṛṅgāra-kau-āgāra* It is indeed a metrical amplification of things described in Kokkoka's *Ratirahasya* Jayadeva himself has often been described as belonging to the Sahajiyā tradition This also holds good in the case of Śrī Caitanya and many of his distinguished followers

What is Sahajayāna? As is known to all, Mahāyāna Buddhism in its later phases became a composite religious system of heterogeneous faiths and practices saturated with the elements of esorterism, sex rites, gods, demi gods, demons, ghosts, magic, charms, sorcery, what not Sahajiyā Buddhism or Sahajayana was an offshoot of this composite religious system Other offshoots of later Mahāyāna Buddhism gave rise to what was known as Tāntric Buddhism and its ramifications There was an obvious link between Sahajayāna and various forms of Tāntric Buddhism, but while the latter maintained more or less a technical character, confined among esoteric circles and secret societies, the former had wider acceptance among the masses Of the leading features of Sahajayāna the following may be noted (I) sharp criticism and rejection of all external formalities in regard to religious practices (II) protest against

and rejection of priestly and scriptural authority, celebacy, penances, austerities and the like, (III) recognition of the human body as the seat and habitat of all religious and spiritual experience, (IV) recognition of the *guru* as essential for any spiritual quest, and (V) recognition of the experience of the ultimate reality as one of inexpressible happiness (*mahāsukha*) The Tantric Buddhist identification of ūnyātā Świth the male and Karunā with the female principle occupied a significant place in Sahajayāna and with the consideration of the human body itself as the seat of all human experience including that of *sahaja mahasukha*, the image and practice of *mithuna* (sexual commerce) became the most important element in the religious practice of Sahajiyā Buddhism in which women came to occupy the most important position [8]

This Sahajiyā tradition was quickly absorbed by Bengal Vaisnavism, numerous traces of which are preserved in Vaisnava literature The Vaisnava theory and practice of unconventional love (*parakīyā*) is a direct adaptation of Sahajiyā Buddhist way of life Dasgupta has shown that the Vaiṣnava poets and apostles like Jayadeva, Vidyāpati, Candidāsa, Rūpa, Sanātana, Jiva Gosvamin and others were believed to be exponents of Sahajiyā practice [9] Even Śri Caitanya himself has been held as having practised Sahaja Sādhanā with female companions and attained perfection through it. He is said to have practised Sahaja Sādhanā in company of Sāthi, daughter of Sārvabhauma [10] It is said in the *Vivartavilāsa* of Akiñcana Dāsa that all the great Vaisnava apostles practised Sahaja-Sādhanā with female companions Śri Rūpa with Mirā, Bhatta Raghunātha with Karn bāi, Sanātana with Lakṣmi Hirā, Lokanātha with a Candāla girl, Krsnadāsa with the milkmaid Pingalā, Śri Jiva with a barber woman called Śyāmā, Raghunātha with Mirā bai, Gopāla Bhatta with Gaura-priyā, and so on

Historically speaking, however, the Buddhist Sahajiyā ideas, which had influenced many later cults and rituals, despite their Buddhist tone and colour, had their origin in the primitive sex rites surviving in India throughout the ages as an important religious undercurrent of esoteric practices We have already occasion to discuss the nature of these esotric, and sometimes open, sexual practices and the material basis of the ideas involved in all these The *real*

8. S. B. Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cults*, Calcutta 1969 pp. 51 ff
9 *ibid.*, pp 113 ff
10 cf *Caitanyacaritāmṛta* Madhyalīlā, Ch XV.

origin of other later cults containing marks of Buddhist influence is also to be sought in the aforesaid primitive tradition, as we shall presently see

## 6. The Nātha Cult

Prof Niharranjan Ray observes "Judging by the north Indian regional literatures on the Nāthasiddha *yogis* and the variety of myths and legends connected with them, it would seem that the Nātha movement was at least a pan-north Indian one, and if Matsyendranatha is regarded as one of the originators of the cult, its antiquity must be at least as old as that of the Sahajayāna Apart from a general predilection towards occult practices and acquisitions of supernatural powers, the Nathasiddhas owed their religious affiliation to the Siva Śakti cult, but their religious discipline was that of *Hathayoga,* which was almost an article of faith with them Yogic practices, somewhat of the nature and character of those of the Nātha *yogis,* were common to the Sahajayāna Buddhist and other esoteric sects, but with the Nātha *yogis* these were the most important means of achieving their goal while with the others these constituted only one of the disciplines With the former it was altogether physiological while with the latter it was also a psychological discipline "[11]

The followers of Nāthism did not accept the term *Sahaja* but many of their ideas and practices were derived from the Sahajiyā Buddhist tradition The Natha objective is to attain *jīvanmukti* or immortality in life and they believe that by making the vital fluid flow upwards (*ultā sādhanā*) and by disciplining of the body and mind (*kāya sādhanā*), the imperfect physical body can be transformed into a ripe (*pakka*) and then into a divine (*divya*) body The sun and moon identified respectively with Śakti and Śiva, female and male principles, are believed to reside in the right and left nerve channels The latter as a male principle is supposed to stand for nectar-essence (*somarasa, amrta, mahārasa*) which the former as a female principle representing fire or heat (*agni*) always wants to consume, and therefore the Nātha yogic aim is to save this *amṛta,* which is the source of immortality, from being consumed That is why the Natha yogis try to keep themselves away from women as far

11 N R. Ray *The Sikh Gurus and the Sikh Society* Patiala 1970 p. 127

as possible[12]

Nāthism, its origin and historical development, its theories and practices, etc have all been thoroughly studied, analysed and described in details by competent scholars[13] Previously it was held that Nāthism was originally an esoteric Buddhist cult and that in course of time having seceded from Buddhism it assumed a Saivite colour Recent researches, however, do not encourage this view Although on the basis of the Tibetan sources it is not difficult to show that the *historical* origin of Nāthism was somehow connected with the later phases of Buddhism, its *real* origin lay more outside Buddhism than inside it, which must be traced to the primitive cults, beliefs and practices The Buddhist tone and colour were due to the fact that many of the primitive and proletarian elements which characterised Nathism and other forms of contemporary religious systems were given for a time being shelter and nourishment by Mahāyāna Buddhism, as is known to all students of religious history

## 7. The Proletarian Elements

The Natha yogis are known in Bengal as *Jugi* which is a term of contempt The lay followers of this cult are formed into a distinct *jugi* caste. Their main occupation is, till very recently, weaving coarse cloth Of the five Ādi Siddhas of the Nāthas, Minanatha belonged to the group of the fishermen In Nepal and Tibet he was known by the synonym Matsyendranātha and was identified with the Buddhist deity Avalokiteśvara Among a class of Bengali Muslims, Matsyendra turned into a Pir called Machandali or Mocharā The next teacher Goraksanatha too was a fisherman In non Bengali tradition he is called Keotyā i e Kaivarta The deriva tive meaning of Jalandhari, which was another name of the third Siddha Hadi pā, is net holder Jālandhari was called Hadi pā not only because he did the work of a Hādi (the sweeper caste in Bengal) but also because he belonged to the same caste He served as a stable-sweep at the palace of queen Mayanāmati of Pātika[14]

12 *ibid*, pp 128-29

13 S B Dasgupta, *op cit*, pp 191 255, H V Guenther, *Yuganaddha* Banares 1952 Kalyani Mallick *Nathasampradāyer Itihas* (Bengali) Calcutta 1950, H P Dwivedi *Nātha Sampradāya* (Hindi), Allahabad 1955

14 See Sukumar Sen in *Cultural Heritage of India*, Vol IV, Calcutta 1956, pp. 280-290

Brahmanical tradition The existing religious systems approved and upheld by the Purānas and the severity of the social laws enumerated in the Smrti texts had no appeal to the toiling masses This accounts for the rise of new cults and disciplines outlined by their own men, the proletarian religious leaders The main features of this new wave were the revival of primitive beliefs and practices, of course not in their original forms, a simpler and less formal approach to the personal deity, orientation of the life by the instructions of the *guru* or preceptor, a liberal and respectful attitude towards women and denial of the caste system To what extent these aims were achieved is a question of historical enquiry The earlier reformers like the Buddha or Mahāvira, who were not proletarians, also stood for many of these principles, but their success was partial The Buddha could abolish the caste system within his Sangha but not among the people at large Rather, in course of the history of Buddhism, the Brāhmana members of the Saṅgha, by virtue of their literacy got hold of the leadership and introduced even within the Sangha a form of caste system The success or failure of any reform movement depends on the class character of its leadership In the medieval reform movements the same thing happened in many cases Those who denounced the caste system and established sects of their own in which admission was open to all, themselves became victims of caste system in course of time But where the leadership did not lose its proletarian character, the castification of sects did not take place, but the sect as a whole came to be looked upon as a lower caste, as has happened in the case of the Nāthas[15] (See section 12)

15 Recently, however, the Nathas are getting influenced by the caste prejudices Sri Gosthabihari Devnath a Nātha teacher and scholar, in his Bengali work on Nāthism has asserted that the Nāthas were originally Rudraja Brāhmanas i e. Brāhmanas born of Rudra and his views have received a wide acceptance among a section of the Nāthas who are now adopting Brahman cal sacraments It is also interesting to note that some of the modern religious teachers have been able to secure a large number of followers from the lower strata of society by declaring them as descendants of the higher castes like the Brāhmanas or the Kṣatriyas As for example, the Namah sūdras have been given the position of Pārasava Vipras the Aguris of the Ugra Kṣatriyas and so on A considerable number of the Marwaris of Calcutta are calling themselves Vedic Va syas who are disciples of such teachers The popularity of this mentality is due to the sense of inferiority current among the so-called lower castes and the desire of their getting higher social status in the existing caste system.

## 8. The Dharma Cult

For the basis of our understanding of a few apparently meaningless proletarian rituals, the significance of which is not expected to be clear from the fragmentary nature of the rituals themselves, we have spoken a lot of words in the preceding sections from which it is possible to form an idea—neither transparent nor opaque, but rather translucent—of a period of transformation in religious life, of the growth of various sects, of the thought-processes involved therein and of the revival of a kind of proletarian spirit which served as a driving force behind such movements. Now we shall deal with a very interesting proletarian cult in which a lot of popular ceremonies and rituals are involved. This is the cult of Dharma which is widely current in different parts of West Bengal. It is an admixture of some relics of decaying Buddhism, popular Hindu ideas and practices, a large number of indigenous beliefs and ceremonies, and ingredients derived also from Islam.

Regarding the antiquity of this cult we may refer to a tortoise-shell inscription of about the eleventh century A.D. It was found in the village of Vajrayoginī in the Dacca district and was first published by N. K. Bhattasali[16] whose reading of the inscription was not, however, correct. Subsequently D. C. Sircar edited the inscription[17] from which it appears that a person named Manaṃra-sarman caused a *Dharma* to be made on his behalf. The material on which the inscription is incised is also conspicuously associated with the cult of Dharma. Tortoise-shells or earthen images of tortoise covered by these shells were worshipped as Dharma Thākur whose worship in the shape a tortoise is still prevalent in the Burdwan and Presidency divisions of West Bengal. K. P. Chattopadhyay whose work on Dharma worship[18] is of great anthropological interest, examined numerous images in the districts of Birbhum, Midnapure and 24 Parganas which were shaped like tortoises.[19] Sukumar Sen also points out that 'the emblem of Dharma—rather his *pāda pīṭha* on which was placed or engraved the *pādukā* (boots or sandals) of Dharma—is a tortoise. In most cases, it is a natural bit of stone shaped like a tortoise, in other cases it is

16 *Annual Report of the Dacca Museum for 1939 40* pp. 7-8.
17 *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, Letters* Vol. XV, pp. 101 ff
18 *ibid.*, Vol. VIII 1942 pp. 99-135
19 *ibid.*, pp. 104-105

a chiselled stone image of the same"[20] In the introduction to *Rūparamer Dharmamangal*, edited by Sukumar Sen and Panchanan Mandal, the god Dharma is clearly associated with *kūrma* or tortoise Sen and Mandal further point out that, although the worship of Dharma is now prevalent only in West Bengal, it was in former times also current in other parts of Bengal[21] They trace it in the present day ceremony of *Del* or worship of Pāt Thākur in East and North Bengal and point to the existence of Dharma Thākur's *Gadi* in the Bogra district. They further connect the Dharma cult with the Chat Parva or Sasthī parva prevalent in Bihar[22]

The Dharma cult was responsible for the creation of a type of literature in Bengali language[23] From the literary works bearing on the cult of Dharma it is abundantly clear that this cult was current among the low class peoples like the Hādis, Doms, Bāgdis, fishermen, carpenters, etc Archaeological investigations have revealed that images and temples of Dharma Thakur as well as ideas and practices related to this cult are also to be found in some parts of Orissa, particularly in Mayurbhanja and its vicinities

## 9. The Dharma Cult and Buddhism

S B Dasgupta has rightly observed "The Dharma cult is a result of a popular comingling of a host of heterogeneous beliefs and practices, it will therefore be incorrect to style it purely Buddhistic or Hindu or indigenous either in origin or in nature,—it is as much a hotchpotch in its origin as it is in its developed form and nature"[24]

It was MM Haraprasad Sastri who played the pioneer's part in bringing to the notice of the public the existence of such a religious cult and the literature on it According to Sastri, the Dharma cult is the *Living Buddhism in Bengal* He pointed out that Dharma's *dhyāna* represents the deity Śūnyamūrti and Nirañjana, which connect

20 *B C Law Volume*, p 672
21 Sen and Mandal, *loc cit*, p. 1
22 Cf D C. Sircar *Religious Life in Ancient and Medieval India* Delhi 1971, pp 189-196
23 For general informations about the Dharma literature of Bengal see S B Dasgupta, *op cit*, pp 308-412
24 *ibid.*, p. 260

the cult with the theory of the *Void*, so popular with the later Buddhists, and show the latter's influence on the former[25] As a popular religious cult, the worship of Dharma owes many of its elements to that form of later Buddhism which is known as Vajrayāna The texts of the Dharma cult like the *Śūnya Purāna* or the *Dharma Pūjā Vidhāna* remind us of the liturgical texts of the Vajrayāna Dr P C Bagchi also thinks that the Dharma cult should be regarded as a survival of Buddhism in Bengal[26] K P Chattopadhyaya speaks of the 'Wheel of Dharma' in connection with the Dharma Thākur Cult[27] It is interesting to note that the followers of the Dharma cult still observe the *Buddhapūrnimā* (the days of the birth, enlightenment and death of the Buddha) and the *Āṣadhī pūrnimā* (the day on which *Dharmacakra* was first preached by the Buddha) as highly auspicious festive days[28]

But side by side it must be admitted that the epithets *Nirañjana* and *Śūnyamūrti* on which Sastri relied so much in emphasising the Buddhist elements may also denote different things Since 'white disease' or leucoderma is resulted from the curse of Dharma and since he is described as all white in form and garment, the epithets *Nirañjana* and *Śūnya* may denote as well his spotless form This is what has been suggested by Sukumar Sen Sastri has also confused the tortoise shape of Dharma with the form of a Buddhist Caitya and ignored the fact that Buddhist literature does not represent Dharma in the shape of a tortoise Buddhist scriptures represent Ādi Dharma as a *goddess* who revealed herself from the centre of a triangle and produced the Buddha, Dharma and Saṅgha from its three sides Dharma that was produced from its second side is the wife of the Buddha produced from the first side, and is the mother of other Buddhas[29] But these conceptions have little to do with the tortoise form of Dharma Thākur whose name, however, connects him with the Buddhist *Ratna* In the Kailan inscription of Sridhāranarāta (seventh century) and the Sundarban inscription of Dommanapala (twelfth century) the expression *Ratnatraya* is used to indicate a Buddhist establishment The three *Ratnas* of the Buddhists—

25 *Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1894 p 135, *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1894 pp 55-61, 65-68
26. P C. Bagchi in *Dacca History of Bengal*, Vol I, p. 425
27 K. P Chattopadhyay, *loc cit*, pp 112 115 figs. 2 3
28 Dasgupta, *op cit.*, p. 272
29 A. Getty, *Gods of Northern Buddhism*, p. 28.

Buddha, Dharma and Saṅgha—came to be worshipped later in Buddhist monasteries and they were represented in human forms The Buddhist image of Dharma was that of a four armed god showing the *añjali* posture against the breast by one pair of hands and carrying the rosary and double lotus in the other[30] Difficult to say whether this deified form of the abstract concept of Buddhist *Dharma* contributed anything to the growth of the Dharma cult of later times

## 10. Dharma and the Brahmanical Deities

Therefore, admitting the fact of a relation between the liturgical works of the Dharma cult with those of later Buddhism, what we can say is that it bears only a faint relation to Buddhism and that the cult as a whole belongs to religious systems other than Buddhism These religious systems also served as *accretions* on a *kernel* which was basically primitive and proletarian, as we shall presently see

In Vedic literature the word *dharma* is used denoting various personified forms[31] In Brahmanical mythology, Dharma is sometimes a separate deity (virtue personified as a bull, dog or dove and identified with Visnu or Prajapati) and sometimes another name of Yama and of Yudhiṣṭhira No representation of an independent deity called Dharma is known[32] Yudhisthira is worshipped in Madras region as Dharmarāja whose cult cannot, however, be related to the Dharma cult of Bengal[33] In the liturgical texts of the Dharma cult, however, the tradition of Dharma's identity with Yama seems to be very popular

Dharma's association with the tortoise reminds us of the tortoise incarnation of Visnu Dharma is often called Svarūpanarāyana In the *Dharmamangalas* we come across not only Dharma in the form of Visnu of dark blue colour with four hands each containing the conch shell, disc, mace and lotus, but also descriptions of the ten incarnations of Visnu in the forms of the ten incarnations of Dharma Vaisnavite myths and legends, found in the epics and Purānas, are sometimes attributed to the god Dharma The identification of

30 D C. Sircar, *op cit*, p 197
31 cf *Śat. Br*, XIII 4 3
32 Sircar *op cit* p 197, Dasgupta, *op cit*, pp 268 ff
33 For the Dharmarāja cult of South India, see K P Chattopadhyay, *loc cit*, pp 129 30

Dharma with Rāma in the *Dharmamaṅgalas* has been brought about mainly through the mediacy of Hanumān But the tradition of Dharma's identity with Visnu or Rāma appears to be less popular than the tradition of his identity with Yama, Sūrya and Śiva The Brahmanical gods whose ingredients have mostly been absorbed by Dharma are these deities as we shall see later while dealing with the cult of Kālārkarudra in connection with the *Cadaka* rituals

## 11. Dharma and Sun

Panchanan Mandal and Sukumar Sen[34] suggest that the cult of the Vedic and Iranian Sun-God, Vedic Varuna, the war god of such peoples as the Doms and Candālas, and several other deities, mostly non Vedic, contributed to the origin and development of the Dharma cult K P Chattopadhyay[35] lays greater stress on Dharma's relation with Vedic Varuna and the latter's association with the Sun He also brings the Dharma Pennu of the Khonds and Dharma of the Santals in relation to the Dharma cult As to the Solar origin of Dharma Thākur, Sukumar Sen observes "Those who have studied this cult in letter and in practice will find out readily that Dharma is the sun god The tortoise (*Kūrma, Kasyapa*) as the symbol or emblem of the (rising ?) sun is probably a non Aryan concept But the identification of the tortoise with the sun appears early in Indo Aryan religion, at least as early as the *Śatapatha Brāhmana* (VII 5 15) As an Aryan god the sun moves in a chariot. So does Dharma As a matter of fact the ceremony of *Rathayatrā* was originally connected with Dharma Like the sun god, Dharma cures incurable diseases like leucoderma The sun god has a bird as his *vahana* and the god of death (Yama) is his son Dharma's direct creation Ulūka (owl) combines the two personalities The monkey cult was originally associated with the sun worship In the cult of the Dharma, Hanuman is his factotum Dharma is also the Iranian sun god He wears *boots,* dresses like a warrior and rides a horse "[36]

So far as Sen's observation is concerned, the Aryan non Aryan question appears to be redundant As regards the *Rathayātrā* festival

34 *Rūparamer Dharmamaṅgal,* intro
35 *loc cit*
36 *B C Law Volume,* p 672

D C Sircar[37] observes that it is popular in the religious life of South India and it seems to have been brought to Eastern India by the South Indians The Ganga kings appear to have popularised the Rathayātrā at the Puri temple and the practice seems to have spread to other Vaisnava temples in these parts But the Rathayātra festival is more primitive and it was connected in different parts of the world with rain magic as Frazer has rightly shown in his *magnum opus*, *The Golden Bough* The relation between the Rathayatrā and rain magic is amply indicated in the Nepalese Buddhist tradition which has a close bearing on the Nātha cult S Levi in his *Le Nepal* has recorded the tradition that once Goraksa came to Nepal in search of his *guru* Matsyendra who was no other than Avalokiteśvara Padmapāni, but as the mountain was difficult to access he tied nine serpents with a *tortoise* (the symbol of Dharma) and sat on them, as a result of which there was drought in the valley for long twelve years Then Matsyendranatha was cleverly brought by the king in Nepal and his presence caused rain in abundance According to another version Goraksa, being offended in Nepal, imprisoned the clouds and put them under his seat for twelve years, as a result of which there was drought and famine By chance Matsyendra was then passing through Nepal and having seen his *guru* when Goraksa stood up the clouds were let loose and there was rain in abundance Thus Matsyendra, in the form of Avalokitesvara Padmapāni, came to be regarded with universal respect in Nepal as the bestower of rain, and his deed is celebrated, still to the present time, by the famous *Rathayātrā* [38] Dharma Thākur's connection with agriculture and rain is also very well known Sen has pointed out that Dharma is a god of water as well and that barren women are bestowed with the gift of progeny by him when worshipped with austerities

## 12. The Proletarian Substratum of the Dharma Cult

Referring to the Dharma cult of Bengal Prof Suniti Kumar Chatterji observes "He is also a god of agriculture, and in Bengal we have a strange conception of Śiva as a farmer, a conception not found elsewhere in India, which appears to be an extension of this aspect of the divinity Dharma to Siva when the latter came to be

37 *op cit.*, p. 199n.
38. S B. Dasgupta *op cit.*, p. 305

identified with the former I have to note one very special thing about Dharma his great annual festival is everywhere accompanied by ritual dances, and sometimes by mimicry and drama without these dances by his worshippers (who usually take up a vow and observe strictly some regulations in living for a month), this annual festival (*gajan*, from *garjana*, as it is called) cannot be held These dances are accompanied by songs, and are performed by troups of devotees "[39] According to Prof Chatterji these features have very little to do with the so called Aryan or Sanskrit culture, the way of life of the higher caste Hindus He also suggests that we should look upon the very respectable Sanskrit name *dharma* with suspicion and may ask ourselves whether the name is a Sanskritisation for some original non Sanskrit name which had a similar sound with the Sanskrit word *An easy Sanskritisation of the Kol name durom, duram* or *daram* into Dharma is quite possible [40]

According to Sukumar Sen, "Saiva Natha cult was not entirely unconnected with Dharma worship The four early Nâtha *Siddhas* are mentioned in the cosmogony of the Dharma cult as directly creat ed from the ashes of the body of Dharma Durlabha Mallika's version is the earliest available form of the Maināmati Govinda-candra legend Therein we find the cosmogony peculiar to the cult of Dharma fully implied Another point of contact between the two cults is the wearing of the symbolic footprint or foot gear (*pāduka*) of Dharma by the Nātha Siddhas as well as by the Dharma priests (*pandita*) "[41] The proletarian character of Nāthism has been referred to in section 7 of this chapter

Sen also observes "Dharma is predominantly a war god of fighting tribes like the Dom and others According to the tradition recorded in the ritualistic treatises, Sada the Dom was the first to worship Dharma Next man was Āsoyā the Gāral (*Candāla*) The latter is said to have offered to Dharma 'tanks of wine' and 'hillocks of rice cakes' *madyer puṣkarnī dilā piṭṭer jāṅgāl* Sacrifice of animals such as goat, duck or pig is made even now in the annual *gājana* ceremony of Dharma Wine and rice cakes are also offered At some places the image is bathed in wine just before the commencement of the ceremony The genuine priests of Dharma generally belong to the Ḍom or Gāral caste and comparatively rarely from

39 *B C. Law Volume*, p. 78.
40 *ibid.*, pp 79-80
41 *ibid.*, p. 670

other castes such as Bāuri, Dhopā, Suri, etc. Dharma was the god that was pleased only with the most cruel austerities. One had to burn incense over head, to walk over live coals, to pierce the most delicate parts of the body with iron spikes, even through the chest before the deity relented and offered the desired gift of son. The hardest penance was self-immolation (*hākanda*), when the devotee cuts off his own head. The cult of Dharma is the quintessence of the native culture, both spiritual (religious) and material. All minor native deities such as Bāsali, Janguli (i.e. Manasā), various Ksetrapalas, Dākinis and Sakinis gathered round Dharma as his courtiers (*avaranā-devata*) and thus obtained general recognition and worship. The legend about the origin of the cultivation of rice has insinuated itself into the grand ceremony (i.e. *gājana*). Other native industries also, such as production of molasses, smelting of copper and iron, etc. have not been overlooked. Thus in the elaborate *gajana* ceremony we witness the slow emergence of early Bengali culture in its main aspects."[42]

## 13. The Gājana of Dharma and Siva

Some of the characteristics of the *gajana* rituals have been discussed in the preceding sections. These rituals are performed mainly, if not exclusively, by the proletarian peoples, and we have seen that, besides the most cruel austerities inherited from primitive religious beliefs,[43] and collective dancing, singing and drumming, which are also legacies of primitive magical practices, the *gajana* rituals contain the professional characteristics of the simpler peoples. According to the followers of the Dharma cult there are five ages—*Setai* or golden, *Nilai* or silver, *Kamsai* or copper, *Rāmai* or iron and *Gomsai* or age to come. This metallic classification is significant. In the liturgical texts of the Dharma cult as well as in the verses recited during the *gājana* of Śiva and Dharma, we have accounts of the origin of corn, *beta*, double drum (*dhāka*), conch (*śankha*), thread, copper, iron, earthen pots and vessels for incense and so on. The word *gājana* appears to have been derived from *garjana*, meaning *roar*, which reminds us of storm and thunder, and as such the ritual in its original character might have stood for rain magic, the most

42 *ibid.*, pp. 673-74

43 *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol II, p 206.

important technique of food production Since in ancient and medieval India the villages were mainly the centres of production, and not the cities of the well to do persons living on the surplus supplied by the villages, these cults and rituals reveal the material culture and social institutions of the rural proletariat Long ago, Ram Comul Sen remarked that the word *gajana* was an abbreviation of *gramajana* meaning the *villagers,* things rural or rustic.

According to Prof Niharranjan Ray,[44] Dharma Thakur is basically a primitive tribal god and his present form is due to the intermixture of countless heterogeneous elements The god Dharma has no fixed form Sometimes he is worshipped in the form of a crude stone Often unused phallic form of Śiva is worshipped in the name of Dharma The Dharma stone bears the characteristics of the sun stone and the phallus serving the purpose of rain and fertility charms These functions are also shared by Siva whose agricultural character was mainly responsible for bringing the two deities under the same roof and for treating them as identical That is why the Śaktis of Siva like Basuli Candi, Durga, Parvati, etc have been associated with Dharma who is frequently styled as Maheśvara, Mahādeva, Devadeva and the like which are commonly used epithets of Siva

The Gajana of Dharma and that of Śiva have become identical "In the book *Ādyer Gambhira* by Mr Haridas Palit we have an elaborate account of the *gājana* of Dharma Even a cursory glance on the verses that were sung with dancing and beating of double drums will show how confusedly Śiva and Dharma have been mixed together in these ceremonies and the verses themselves are really fragments found in the liturgical works of the Dharma cult and the *Śivāyanas* of Bengal It is very interesting to note that this ceremony of *gājana* is also found in some districts of East Bengal in the form of Nila Puja (i e worship of the deity Nila), and this elaborate religious ceremony, which takes place in the last week of the Bengali year and takes about a week's time to be completed is never suspected by the people in these districts to be anything but a Hindu religious function primarily concerned with the Hindu deity lord Śiva [45] The fragmentary verses that are generally recited in connection with the various ceremonies of this function have striking affinity

44 *Bāngalir Itihās* (Beng ) Vol. I p 586
45 See D C. Sen *Vanga Sāhitya Paricaya* Calcutta University Pub, Part I pp. 159-161

with the verses found in the liturgical works of the Dharma cult and also in the *gājana* of Dharma of West Bengal not only in matter and spirit, but sometimes in language also with slight deviations "[46]

In the beginning of the nineteenth century, W Ward saw the *gājana* and *cadaka* of Dharma in the villages of Pusuri and Raikali Since Ward had no idea about the existence of a distinct Dharma cult and the rituals of Dharma did not appear very different to him from those of Śiva, he considered Dharma Thākur to be another form of Śiva According to him, "a black stone of any shape becomes the representative of this god The worshippers paint the part designated as the forehead and place it under a tree, others place the stone in the house and give it silver eyes, and anoint it with oil and worship it Almost every village has one of these idols A festival in honour of this god is observed by the lower orders The ceremonies are like those of the swinging festival with the addition of bloody sacrifices, the greater number of which are goats At this time devotees swing on hooks, perforate their sides with cords, pierce their tongues with spits, walk upon the fire and take it up in their hands, walk upon thorns and throw themselves upon spikes, keeping a severe fast The people who assemble to see these feats of self torture are entertained with singing, music and dancing, etc "[47]

## 14 Gājana and Cadaka · The Participating Deities

All the items mentioned by Ward are still in vogue and they are shared by the *gājana* and *cadaka* rituals dedicated now a days mainly to Śiva These two sets of rituals stand in reciprocal relation and the one cannot be distinguished from the other We may rather say that the *cadaka* and kindred ceremonies are offshoots of the traditional *gājana*, and some of the constituents of the latter like hook swinging, etc were absorbed and specialised by the grown offshoots We can thus define the *gājana* as a very primitive ritual complex surviving throughout the ages among the lower orders of society as well as among the tribal peoples which has always found expression with the growth of the proletarian cults in different parts of the country at different ages

46 Dasgupta, *op cit*, pp 279-280
47 W Ward *A View of the History, Literature and Religion of the Hindoos*, Vol II, p 184

Of the tribal cults and rituals of eastern India, supposed to have some bearing on this primitive ritual complex, reference may be made to the Māndā, Saharul, Ba-parav, Bate-ili, Phāgu, Phāguā, Soherai, Akhān-Sendrā, Karam, Jitiya, Deothān, Jādurā, Khaddi-parav, Paus-parav, Māgh-parav and Cait-parav of the Mundas, Sāhare, Sakrāt, Bāhā, Māghsin, Eroksim, Mākmore, Bātāuli and Yamnanā of the Santals, Saharul, Grāmapūja, Grām-bāndā, Goerā, Soharaī and Karam of the Oraons, Karam, Goera, Tusu, Sarul, Māghi, Māghsim, Akhām, Bāhā and Sakrāt of the Mahālis, Saharul, Des sikār, Dalma-pujā, Karam, Bāndhnā, Buru, Māghpūjā, Tusu, Makar-samkrānti, Pañcavahini, Bardelā, Deośāli, Grām-devatā, Kudrā and Visāicandi of the Bhūmijs, Pati-Asadi, Garbhu, Cadak, Rakam, Māghi, Jituā, Vasumati and Mahādeo of the Malpāhāris, Paus-parav, Māgh parav, Khāria-pūjā, Saharul, Bāhā, Gosāpunya, Bātāuli, Gram-parav, Bāndhna, Gohāl-pūjā and Jemmamā of the Hos, *Sosābanga, Nav jom, Karam, Jituā, Desāi, Sohrāi and* Grām-thākur of the Birhors, Śiva, Dāk, Goerā, Tusu and Maghi of the Korās, Barām, Bāndhnā, Jathel and Tusu of the Lodhās, and so on [48] The exact relation of these tribal cults and rituals with the primitive ritual complex we have described as *gājana* has not yet been established About 40 years ago, K P Chattopadhyay[49] in one of his valuable articles had established the common basis of *Māndā, Cadaka* and Dharma cult [49a] Others require to be worked out

48 A Mitra *Rad̤her Samskriti O Dharma Thakur* (Bengali) Calcutta 1972, pp 255-56

49 *Journal and Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, New Series, Vol XXX, 1934, pp 151 161

49a. The Manda festival which has a wide currency among the Mundas, Oraons and other tribes and castes of Bihar, to which reference has been made above, is a form of *Cad̤aka*. Like the Sannyāsis of Gājana the participants of the Manda, who are called Bhoktās and supposed to be possessed by Śiva, have to follow certain rules and regulations and observe a number of taboos For about a month before the commencement of the festival they beg from door to door carrying a nailed log which is regarded as the image of Pārvati On the second day of the festival a rite called *kandhāiya* 'or carrying on the shoulder' is performed The Bhoktās sit on a line and the high priest, usually a Gosain steps on their shoulders to reach the place of Śiva Then takes place at night the rite of *phulkudnā* or 'stepping on flowers' Before the shrine of the god who is generally Śiva, a trench about fifteen feet in length and three or four feet in width, is dug and filled with *live charcoal When the fire is perfectly ready*, the Bhoktās walk across it. Sometimes they jump on the fire until it is

Of the deities associated with this primitive ritual complex, we can divide them on the basis of their class character. Connected with Dharma are Bāṇa and Bāneśvarī, the god and goddess symbolizing the hoe, and the sisters of the latter—Nandiśvarī, Śankheśvarī, Dudheśvarī, Ghāgeśvarī, Khagesvarī, etc.,—all local deities Of the *kāminyās* or consorts of Dharma, we have Sasṭhi, the goddess of childbirth, Śītalā, the goddess of small-pox, Manasā, the goddess of snakes, Dhavaladevī, the goddess of leprosy, Candī, Durgā, Kālī, etc. who were previously the consorts of Śiva, and so on. In the *Dharmapūjāvidhāna* the following deities are mentioned as *āvaranadevatās* who are connected with the *gājana* and other rituals of Dharma. They are Ganeśa, Sūrya, Śiva, Visnu, Durgā, Laksmi, Visahari, Bhairava, Bāśuli, Sarasvatī, Kuvera, Sasthī, Bhagavatī, Vasumatī, Viśālāksī, Vaṭukanātha, Ksetrapālas, Brahmānī, Māheśvarī, Vaisṇavī, Vārāhī, Nārasimhī, Indrānī, Cāmundā, Brahmā, Garuḍa, Viśvakarmā, Dvārapālas, Nandī, Kāmadeva, Baneśvara, Pandāsura, Dikpālas, Śvetapanḍita, Nīlapanḍita, Kamsāripandita, Ramāipanḍita, Nine Agnis, Magarapandita, Kālughosa, Bhaṭṭadharādhara, Bhāskara-nrpati, Sādhupura Datta, Tāmbuli, Uttararādha, Daksinarāḍha, Āśoyā-Canḍāla, Ādinātha, Dīnanātha, Caurangīnātha, Goraksanātha, Pañcagauda, Gaudeśvara, etc. The reason behind the inclusion of Brahmanical deities has been explained in the tenth section of this chapter. Besides the major gods of the Five Cults (*Pañcopasanā*), the list contains the Bhairavas, the Mātrkās, the Dikpālas, the Ksetrapālas, the Dvārapālas, the Nātha teachers, the Panditas of the Dharma cult and deified human beings. From other sources we come across a new set of deities like Kālārkarudra, Kālāgnirudra, Gambhīra, Carakī, Hājarā, Nīlacaṇdikā, etc. These deities are especially worshipped in connection with the *Cadaka* rituals and liturgical texts were also composed in their honour, as we shall see in a subsequent section.

## 15. The Death and Resurrection Theme in Gājana Rituals

That the *gājana* and *cadaka* dedicated to Dharma, Śiva and other deities have a close bearing on the primitive conceptions of death and

extinguished. Females also take part in these performances. They are called Sokthāins. The function over, dance competitions, sometimes mask dances, are held On the last day, the hook-swinging, with the Bhoktas its participants, takes place. See section 19.

resurrection[50] is amply indicated by a few of the surviving rituals which may be classified into five distinct groups on the basis of their contents

To the first group belong the simple vegetation and fertility rites which as we have seen in different chapters of this work have given birth to the myths of the dying gods and mourning goddesses all over the world the annual death and revival of the god symbolizing the annual death and revival of plant life In many parts of Bengal the dead spirit of vegetation—Dharma Śiva or anything even the *caḍala tree*—is kept under water for the whole year in a pond, and during the *gājana* the image is recovered in which the power of life is ceremonially infused as if the dead is brought back to life again The throwing of images into water and the mourning for them recall the European custom of throwing the dead spirit of vegetation under the name of Death Yarilo Kostroma and so on into the water and lamenting over it Keeping the vegetation deity submerged under water is a well known and widely current form of rain magic and we have many instances in which certain stones are conceived as the rain making god and in the time of drought they are carried in procession and dipped in a stream[51] A banana leaf serves as the only garment of the priest performing the bathing rite of Dharma and this reminds us of the ceremonial nudity connected with rain and fertility charms[52]

In the third chapter we have dealt with the ritual use of wine as the source of fecundity and rebirth It is the fluid power that gives a new life to everything Even in the Vedic hymns wine is regarded as the drug of immortality Its life giving power has given to it the name *mṛtasañjīvanī* that which enlivens even the dead The magical use of wine so common in fertility and funeral rites also finds expression in the *gājana* of Dharma and other deities A gigantic vessel of wine called *bhāṇḍāl* is brought in front of the deity Smaller vessels are also brought Dances are held around the principal vessel and the participants become quite senseless which is caused sometimes by mere pretention sometimes by the actual intoxicating effect of the liquor and sometimes by inhaling the smoke of powerful incense In many places mock or actual fights are held among the participants for the possession of the vessel In some villages of

50 *See chapter seven.*
51 Frazer *The Golden Bough* p 75
52 *Sup a*

the Birbhum district the Dharma stone is carried in procession to the house of a *Śundi* (belonging to the wine making caste) who anoints it with oil and wine At places again the actual task of brewing is performed before the god Where Brahmanical influence is greater, milk is used instead of wine Such wine rituals are also current in different parts of South India [53]

Fire festivals connected with the ideas of death and resurrection form an integral part of the *gājana* ceremony These festivals consist of dancing around the fire, procession with burning torches, fire gymnastics, walking on the fire, jumping upon burning woods and so on and can be connected with primitive fire cults, relics of which are found in the parallel European customs like May Fire, Bon Fire, Midsummer Fire, etc We have seen that the Holi and Dewali festivals are connected with primitive conceptions of death and resurrection which were based upon the observation of death and revival in plant life In different parts of India, especially in many districts of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Orissa, fire festivals are held during the celebration of Holi, and the ashes thus produced from the kindling of the fire are sprinkled on the ground for the multiplication of crops and fruits Prof N K Bose connects the origin of the fire rites of Holi with such tribal rites as the Meria killing of the Khonds It was a human sacrifice for increasing the productivity of the fields They believe that Mother Earth bestows power of life through harvest and that power of life can be returned to her by offering a life i e by a human sacrifice Accordingly, the body of the victim was burnt and the ashes were sprinkled on the earth This rite was also characterised by heavy consumption of wine and indiscriminate sexual intercourse, and this explains the relation between Holi and the sex rituals mentioned in the preceding chapter, relics of which are still found in the sexual gestures and obscene types of mock fights, dances, songs and jokes forming essential features of the festival in different parts of the country Human sacrifice for enhancing the fertility of the fields, which survived till lately among the wild tribes like the Khonds, was, once widely current among the peoples of India, but with the spread of relatively advanced ideas, which were evolved under different historical conditions, it went practically out of vogue But its relics are not completely stamped out which still survive in the forms of stepping

53 Whitehead, *Village Gods of South India* (YMCA) pp 49 ff See *Supra*, pp 53 55

on the fire, burning of animals burning of artificial human bodies, imitation of the act of killing, and so on (N K Bose, *Hindu Samājer Gadan*, Beng , Visvabharati, pp 71-77)

The death and resurrection theme also finds expression in the ritual of an actual deadbody which is connected with the *gajana* and *cadaka* of Dharma In this ritual a game is played with the head of a dead person The *Bānavrata* of Siva is also a ritual connected with corpse in which a human skull is anointed with vermilion and oil which becomes the occasion of a collective dance in which the priests and devotees are the participants The phallus of Śiva which is kept for a whole year under the water of a pond is then recovered and worshipped The head priest gives a show of the supernatural power he has acquired through such rituals by perforating his tongue and by other feats of physical endurance [54]

It is generally believed that the *gājana* is the festival of Siva's marriage with Devi or of Dharma's marriage with Mukti and the participants called *Bhaktyās* or *Bhaktiyas* who take the vows of asceticism are the members of the bridegroom's party But why should the jubilant marriage party follow the custom of maintaining the traditional state of impurity by using mourning dress made of unwashed raw cotton, by hanging around the neck a key which is the specific mark of death in the family, by eating sun-dried rice self cooked in a secluded spot which is done by the kinsmen of the dead, by abstaining from sexual intercourse, sleeping on the ground, allowing the hair, beard and nails to grow and so on which are exclusively funeral observances ? The common Hindu rule is that when a death takes place, the kinsmen of the dead must consider themselves as impure until the *śrāddha* rite is performed This is called *Asauca pālana* or maintaining the state of impurity The whole thing therefore appears to be a miming of a very primitive ritual-mourning, centering round the myth of annual death and resurrection of a vegetation deity, an Indian parallel of Adonis, Attis or Osiris who symbolized the spirit of corn, dying every year and again rising from the dead [55]

## 16 The Cadaka of Dharma

Dr Amalendu Mitra has collected important data from the

54 H K. Mukherjee, *Birbhum Bibarani* (Bengali) Vol. II pp 5-9

55 For the rituals see A. Mitra *op cit*, pp. 50-115

Birbhum district of West Bengal regarding the *Cadaka* of Dharma Thākur[56] The main features of this *Cadaka,* as recorded by Dr Mitra, are hook swinging, perforation of the tongue, fire festivals, wine ritual, cult of Bāna Gosain or Banesvara, collective dancing, and offering of small images of horse The significance of some of these features have been discussed above

Of the remaining features, cult of Baneśvara deserves special mention This cult in some places is also connected with the *gajana* and *cadaka* of Siva , Although worshipped as a god, basically Banesvara represents a weapon, an arrow (*bāna*) The primitive custom of piercing the body with sharp weapons, of perforating the tongue, etc , commonly called *Banfodā,* has been rationalised through the conception of this deity During the worship of Dharma, the image of Bānesvara becomes the occasion of a ceremony of circumambulation We have also a female form of this deity As we have remarked above, this god was probably a primitive agricultural deity connected with hoe cultivation, and in course of time he had developed a relationship with other agricultural deities like Dharma or Śiva An arrow or a spear like instrument is considered to be the symbol of this god upon which fruits and vegetables are thrown so that they get pierced This rite may have some bearing on the aforesaid *bānfoda* which is so common a feature of the *cadaka* and *gājana* of Dharma

Small terracotta images of horse are offered to the Dharma shrines and wooden horses also play a significant part in the *Gājana* and *Cadaka* of Dharma, but not in those of Śiva Small clay figurines of horse are also offered to the Pir shrines In popular belief horse is the vehicle of Dharma, but this does not explain the custom although in Vedic mythology horse is the vehicle of the Sun god some of whose characteristics have been absorbed by Dharma Thākur, as we have seen above The horse is connected with many a primitive belief especially with those that were associated with ideas of fertility, as we have seen in the first chapter while dealing with the rituals of the Asvamedha or the horse sacrifice Sir James Frazer in his *Golden Bough* has given many examples of primitive agricultural beliefs and practices connected with horse and come to the conclusion that the horse represents the fructifying spirit both of the tree and of the corn, and hence the cause of the use

56 *ibid*, pp 146 ff

of terracotta and wooden horses in the Dharma cult should be traced to such primitive fertility beliefs

The same motive also explains the use of cane in the *gajana* of Dharma The cane is not only kept in the shrine, but during the festival the participants pat the ground with canes in the name of Dharma Imitations of beating the imaginary enemies with the sticks are also made These enemies are surely malignant spirits who cause harm to the community in various ways Referring to similar customs observed elsewhere Frazer remarks "It comes to be thought desirable to have a general riddance of evil spirits at fixed times usually once a year in order that the people may make a fresh start in life freed from all the malignant influences which have been long accumulating about them "[57] In the cults of the South Indian village gods sticks and swords are used to drive away the evil spirits [58] The use of stick has some specific functions also, especially in the cases of natural and human productivity Among different tribes of Southern India patting the ground by a stick is done in connection with childbirth and puberty rites [59] The Oraon farmers before transplanting the rice-seedlings pat the ground with a stick evidently to infuse productive power into the earth [60]

## 17. Kālārkarudra: The Brāhmanised Form of Dharma

Prof Chintaharan Chakravarti[61] refers to a god named Kālarkarudra as one of the principal deities honoured in the rituals of *cadaka* This god is described in a few recent manuals[62] as being like 10 million rising suns in splendour, having the sun, the moon and fire as his eyes, having the digit of the moon in the locks of his matted hair brightened by the glow of lightning and carrying in two of his hands a bell and a sword, and with the other two forming the *mudrās* of dispelling fear and granting boons Terrible to look at and laughing as thunder, this god is the dispeller of the fear of those that bow

57 Frazer, *op cit*, p 722
58 Whitehead *op cit.* p. 49
59 E Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, Madras 1909 Vol V, p 344
60 S C. Roy, *The Oraons of Chota Nāgpur*, Ranchi 1915 pp 142 ff.
61 *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Letters* Vol I 1935, pp 429 ff
62 Harimohan Chakravarti, *Kālārkarudrapūjāpaddhati* Calcutta 1319 B. S , Nrisimha Vidyabhushan, *Caḍakapūjāpaddhati*, Calcutta 1336 B. S , and a MS of of *Kālārkarudrapūjā* in the possession of Pandit Baman Chandra Gautama of Kotalipara in the Faridpur district which Prof Chakravarti could use

down to him

As his name implies, this god is the combination of three deities—*Kāla* or Yama, *Arka* or the Sun and *Rudra* who came to be known as Śiva One of the manuals which Prof Chakravarti has used actually describes this god as the combination of Kala, Arka and Rudra Of these, Kala the god of death is described as the destroyer of all animals, the giver of the desired boon to the devotee, the fear ful, the knower of all religion the Vaiṣnava the son of the Sun having a terrible face, four hands huge feet, a black complexion, red and deep-set eyes a big body, a bright lotus like face, having a great buffalo as his carrier, having in his hands an iron mace, a net, wine and a staff Arka (the sun) is described as the sea of endless qualities the lord of all the worlds, having the red lotus as his seat, a jewel on the head a reddish hue of the body, carrying two lotuses in two of his hands and forming with the other two the gestures of dispelling fear and granting boons Rudra is described as the lord of the universe seated on the bull the giver of boons the dispeller of fear, three eyed five faced with his body besmeared with ashes, with a small drum and trident in his hands, with the head marked by the moon and having a serpent on his neck

This Kalarkarudra is evidently a recent Brahmanical adaptation of Dharma under a new name supposed to connote the surviving principal deities forming the substrata of the earlier conception of Dharma Thakur as a composite popular deity It has sufficiently been demonstrated in the preceding sections how the cult of Death (Yama or Kala) Sun (Arka) and Śiva (Rudra) contributed to the growth of Dharma cult, and there is no need of repeating the arguments once again

## 18 Nīlacandika and Others

The consort of Kalarkarudra is Nīlacandika or Nīlaparamesvarī also known as Nīla or Nīlavatī She is identified with Śakti or the supreme goddess In the *Kalarkarudrapujā paddhati* referred to by Chakravarti we have the name Nīlaparamesvarī who has been identified with Kalī This goddess should be worshipped on an image drawn with blue powder of a half bodied being rid ng on a horse. The worship of Nīla or Nīlacandika appears to have been at the root of the name Nilapuja given to the function in general in Eastern Bengal We have already the occasion to refer to the

*gājana* of Nila In the *Cadakapūjāpaddhati*, also mentioned by Chakravarti, we have the worship of a male god who is known as Nila whose image is drawn on an earthen platform with 'five powders' The god is described, as half bodied, two-armed, three-eyed, having a blue body and terrible appearance His vehicle is horse

Another god worshipped in connection of *cadaka* is Ksetrapāla to whom worship is offered at midnight There is also a Śaivite deity of this name[63] This god is naked, has his tawny hairs dishevel led, has the sun and the moon as his eyes, carries a fearful staff in his right hand and a skull full of wine in the left Animal sacrifices are offered to this deity by the left hand Needless to say that basically he was the protector of agriculture impersonating one of the functional aspects of Dharma From the *Kālārkarudrapūjā* Chakravarti refers to a deity called Gambhira who is also worshipped in connection with *Cadaka* outside the temple This god is described as having purely white complexion, a camphor like white body, which helps us to identify him with any local form of Dharma getting the status of an independent god Two other deities, to be worshipped outside the village, are Kedāra and Hājarā Of the former we get no iconographic description, while the latter is described as white-coloured, four-armed, naked and possessing matted hair This deity appears to be different from a god called Gopāla Hājarā who is worshipped in connection with the cult of Jayadurgā in different parts of East Bengal[64]

## 19. The Rituals of Cadaka

In modern times the popular festival of *Cadaka* has been conspicuously associated with the worship of Siva and in some cases with that of Dharma, as we have seen above This festival is widely current in Bengal and in some parts of Orissa[65] The main cult characterising the festival is that of Śiva whose worship is performed daily during the month of *Caitra* with an image, a water vase or a *linga* or a *Dharmaśilā* (stone representing the god Dharma) as the

63 C. Chakravarti in *Indian Historical Quarterly*, Vol. IX, pp 237 ff
64 Idem in *Man in India*, Vol XI, p 47, *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Bombay* Vol. XIV, pp. 69 ff
65 For Orissa see S N Roy in *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Bombay*, Vol. XIV, pp. 188 ff

symbol of the deity The main function takes places during the last three days of the month

Of its special religious features mention should be made of *Mudrābhañjana* or the initial worship which is connected with some local deity The rituals are not same in all the places In eastern Bengal, about a week before the day of the principal worship the phallic image of Siva is taken out and kept dipped in a pot (*gambhirapatra*) full of water, the magical significance of which have been mentioned above Then we have the Adhivāsa or preliminary purification, popularly known as *gṛhasannyasa* or *girisannyasa* which is performed in the dwelling house while the principal worship is performed in any temporarily erected hut This is followed by the worship of the Dvarapalas (deities that guard the doors) and gods like Ksetrapala Lastly the deities are bathed with different sorts of water (e g water of the Ganges, water of the sea rain water, etc ) and with other liquids like milk, curd, honey, ghee, etc [66] A specially noteworthy feature of the whole function is that non-Brahmins including members of the lowest castes are allowed to take prominent part in it It is these peoples that serve as *Bālās* or *Sangas* (popularly known as Sāiṅ) Salutation by the *Sāngas* is an imposing ceremony Each of them is required to bow down before the deity for a specific number of times with specific postures and in some cases to the accompaniment of specific tunes of music The term *Sanga* reminds us of the Buddhist term *Sangha* meaning community of brethren, and the Bengali word *Sangat* means a companion In any case, the denotative names of the *Sangas* indicate the function they have to discharge Thus the Jalasābhata is to bring in water, the Sthānapatra is to sweep, and so on They also take part in all festivities and undergo physical tortures [67]

K P Chattopadhyay has given a vivid description of a modern *Cadaka* ceremony [68] Except in places where there are brick built temples, the first thing that is done is to construct a temporary thatched hut for the deity who is generally Śiva An earthen figure of a crocodile is made of earth A square mound of earth is built up with a circular projection in the front At the centre of the mound is kept an earthen pot full of Ganges water A small phallic image of Siva is brought on an earth dish and put on the pot All the

66 C. Chakravarti, *loc cit*

67 *ibid.*, pp 429-32

68 *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, Letters*, Vol. I, 1935, pp 397-406

preparations are made by the chief devotee, called *Mūla Sannyāsī* in Central Bengal at *Pat Bhakta* in West Bengal In some places each of the devotees are furnished with a cane stick The devotees fast during the day time on the 25th Caitra, put vermilion marks and rice paste on the waterpot, and the deity is then installed by the priest Certain details of worship have to be gone through every day Then comes the special ceremonials of each date which are

1 The swing over the fire
2 *The jump on thorns*
3 The jump on knives
4 The piercing with arrows
5 The marriage of Śiva and fire dance
6 The swinging on the *cadaka* tree
7 The propitiation of the resuscitated ghosts

In most places the swinging over the fire is done on the 26th and in a few places on the 25th and 27th The frame erected for swinging consists of two tall bamboo poles set apart about ten feet from each other and with a cross bar of bamboo being fixed at the height of six feet from the ground The fire is lit of the wood of the *Kul* tree The fire is allowed to burn out to some extent so that there *is plenty of live charcoal The devotee gets up on the cross* bar and hangs his head downwards supporting himself by twisting his leg over the cross bar The function over, the devotee and his assistants dance on the live charcoal until the embers are put out Often a handful of embers is carried quickly to the altar of the god and offered to him like flowers

On the next day (27th Caitra) the jump on thorns takes place The date palms and thorny branches of the *beyunch* tree are heaped for this purpose After the usual preliminary worship, the devotees come to the heap of thorns and drop flat on it and roll on it shouting, 'worship to the old Śiva' The jump on knives usually takes place *on the 28th The knives are fixed on a plantain stem The devotees* get up on the frame of bamboo already described Two men carrying a sack of straw stand in front Another lays on it the plantain stem with knives and holds it firmly The devotees then jump one by one on the knives, calling on Śiva The height between the sack and the cross bar varies from four to twelve feet in different places In some places the jump on knives is preceded by what is

termed *manibhanga* or jewel breaking A date palm tree is selected and worshipped, and the devotees climb it to pluck with the teeth the thorny blade at the tip of the top leaf The blade is carried in the mouth, held between the teeth all the way back to the place of worship and kept until another ceremony, *phalchoda* or throwing the fruits is over

The next day (29th Caitra) is known everywhere as the date of the *Nīla*, Siva's marriage with Nīlavatī, which is marked by the imitation of marriage rituals especially performed by women The afternoon rituals are performed by the males with a scarf over the head indicating that they are doing women s part The details are in fact exactly similar to the marriage rites of peoples of the rank of pure artisans and similar castes in Bengal The nine *grahas* or planets are worshipped in connection with this marriage by drawing up a circle made by powdered rice Formerly on this date the ceremony of piercing with arrows used to be performed At present the actual piercing still survives in some outlying villages although it has been made illegal for many years Iron rods or thin shafts are pushed through the skin into the ribs A pair is used by each devotee It was also formerly the practice to perform certain other penances involving piercing of the skin of the body in various other places The most important of these was that known as the *kalikapatan* The devotee had the skin pierced in many places by thin short arrows with the red *jabā* flower stuck at each end Generally he went off into a trance after a time and was thought to return to life only on hearing the *Hakanda Purana* or the description of the Dharma worship

The next day (30th Caitra) is the day of *Cadaka* or swinging on the *cadaka* tree which consists of (1) a thick pole of palm or some wood fixed upright on the ground (2) a rotator fixed on it and (3) a strong bundle of bamboos fixed horizontally on the rotator which would carry the human load at one end and a balancing load at the other After a conventional worship of the *cadaka* tree the lighter end is pulled down by a guide rope and the devotee gets up to swing round Formerly the devotee used to be suspended by iron hooks attached to the bamboo frame and fixed in the muscles of the back Now a days he is simply tied by a rope

On the next day i e on the first day of the Bengali year is performed the last function the resuscitation of the dead (*dānobārāno*) The chief devotee cooks a *sol* fish, roasting it in ember Some

parboiled and husked rice is also cooked and rice wine is poured on the fish and the rice, which are placed in an earthen pot These are taken at midday to a tree standing in some lonely meadow, and the food is poured on a plantain leaf and left for the ghosts to devour *This offering is sometimes made in the meadow where the village* dead are cremated Some devotees smear their faces with mud to personate demons or ghosts They dance and shout and finally eat the fish and rice A dark coloured mask is sometimes used These supposed ghosts are collectively called *San* Recently, however, the procession of *San* has changed its character Instead of being the ceremony of resuscitation of ghostly beings, it has now be come that of miming the social vices of the well to do class, which reveal the proletarian attitude towards the corrupt practices of class society

## 20. Conclusion

K P Chattopadhyay appears to be quite correct when he says that all these rites and cults are closely connected with each other and that they are all based on a belief in resurrection, or coming to life after death and are intended to celebrate annually the return to the life of the diseased members of the community [69] The circle of birth and death might have found a ritual expression in the hook-swinging Long ago Ram Comul Sen pointed out that the term *caraka* (*cadaka*) may be a transformation of *cakra* meaning a circle, and such interchange of letters is a common grammatical feature of the regional languages, which is known as *viprakarṣa* (cf Ratna Ratan) [70] The festival of hook swinging has its parallel elsewhere [71] The swinging festival of Siam appears to have some resemblance with that of the *cadaka* Physical tortures similar to those practised on this occasion are stated to be practised in connection with the worship of Kārtikeya in Kataragama in Ceylon [72] But our point of interest is the basic proletarian character of these cults and rituals for which they were treated without enthusiasm and with contempt Not even a passing reference to these cults and rituals is made by the famous Smṛti writers of Bengal—Govindānanda and Raghunandana

69 *ibid*, p 406

70 *Journal of the Asiatic Society*, 1833, No 24 p 609

71 Cf J N Powell, Hook-Swinging Mysore in *Folklore* Vol. XXV 1914

72 *Kalyanakalpataru*, Gorakhpur, Vol II p 755

—whose works, the *Varṣakriyākaumudī* and the *Tithitattva*, contain what may be said to be a comprehensive survey of religious practices of Bengal during the 15th-16th centuries[73] The reason of such suppression or hushing up of the facts of proletarian life by the advocates of the Smārta-Purānic ideals can easily be understood

73 C. Chakravarti, *loc cit*

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